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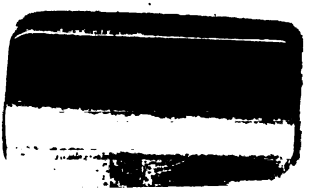

WHITE WINGS

A YACHTING ROMANCE

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A YACHTING ROMANCE

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

WHITE WINGS

A YACHTING ROMANCE

CHAPTER I.

ON THE QUAY.

A MURMUR runs through the crowd; the various idlers grow alert; all eyes are suddenly turned to the south. And there, far away over the green headland, a small tuft of brown smoke appears, rising into the golden glow of the afternoon, and we know that by and by we shall see the great steamer with her scarlet funnels come sailing round the point. The Laird of Denny-mains assumes an air of still further importance; he pulls his frock-coat tight at the waist; he adjusts his black satin necktie; his tall, white stiff collar seems more rigid and white than ever. He has heard of the wonderful stranger; and he knows that now she is drawing near.

Heard of her? He has heard of nothing else since ever he came to us in these northern wilds. For the mistress of this household—with all her domineering ways and her fits of majestic temper—has a love for her intimate girl-friends far passing the love of men; especially when the young ladies are obedient, and gentle, and ready to pay to her matronly dignity the

compliment of a respectful awe. And this particular friend who is now coming to us: what has not the Laird heard about her during these past few days?—of her high courage, her resolute unselfishness, her splendid cheerfulness? "A singing-bird in the house," that was one of the phrases used, "in wet weather or fine." And then the enthusiastic friend muddled her metaphors somehow, and gave the puzzled Laird to understand that the presence of this young lady in a house was like having sweet-brier about the rooms. No wonder he put on his highest and stiffest collar before he marched grandly down with us to the quay.

"And does she not deserve a long holiday, sir?" says the Laird's hostess to him, as together they watch for the steamer coming round the point. "Just fancy! Two months' attendance on that old woman, who was her mother's nurse. Two months in a sick-room, without a soul to break the monotony of it. And the girl living in a strange town all by herself!"

"Ay; and in such a town as Edinburgh," remarks the Laird, with great compassion. His own property lies just outside Glasgow.

"Dear me," says he, "what must a young English leddy have thought of our Scotch way of speech when she heard they poor Edinburgh bodies and their yaumering sing-song? Not that I quarrel with any people for having an accent in their way of speaking; they have that in all parts of England as well as in Scotland—in Yorkshire, and Somersetshire, and what not; and even in London itself there is a way of speech that is quite recognisable to a stranger. But I have often thought that there was less trace of accent about Glesca and the west of Scotland than in any other part; in fact, ah have often been taken for an Englishman maself."

"Indeed!" says this gentle creature standing by him; and her upturned eyes are full of an innocent belief. You would swear she was meditating on sum-

moning instantly her boys from Epsom College that they might acquire a pure accent—or get rid of all accent—on the banks of the Clyde.

"Yes," says the Laird, with a decision almost amounting to enthusiasm, "it is a grand inheritance that we in the south of Scotland are preserving for you English people; and you know little of it. You do not know that we are preserving the English language for you as it was spoken centuries ago, and as you find it in your oldest writings. Scotticisms! Why, if ye were to read the prose of Mandeville or Wyclif, or the poetry of Robert of Brunne or Langdale, ye would find that our Scotticisms were the very pith and marrow of the English language. Ay; it is so."

The innocent eyes express such profound interest that the Laird of Denny-mains almost forgets about the coming steamer, so anxious is he to crush us with a display of his erudition.

"It is just remarkable," he says, "that your dictionaries should put down, as obsolete, words that are in common use all over the south of Scotland, where, as I say, the old Northumbrian English is preserved in its purity; and that ye should have learned people hunting up in Chaucer or Gower for the very speech that they might hear among the bits o' weans running about the Gallowgate or the Broomielaw. '*Wha's acht ye?*' you say to one of them; and you think you are talking Scotch. No, no; *acht* is only the old English for possession: isn't '*Wha's acht ye?* shorter and pithier than '*To whom do you belong?*'"

"Oh, certainly!" says the meek disciple: the recall of the boys from Surrey is obviously decided on.

"And *speir* for *inquire;* and *ferly* for *wonderful;* and *tyne* for *lose;* and *fey* for *about to die;* and *reek* for *smoke;* and *menseful* for *becoming;* and *belyve,* and *fere,* and *biggan,* and such words. Ye call them Scotch? Oh, no, ma'am; they are English; ye find them in all the old English writers; and they are the best of

English too; a great deal better than the Frenchified stuff that your southern English has become."

Not for worlds would the Laird have wounded the patriotic sensitiveness of this gentle friend of his from the South; but, indeed, she had surely nothing to complain of in his insisting to an Englishwoman on the value of thorough English?

"I thought," says she, demurely, "that the Scotch had a good many French words in it."

The Laird pretends not to hear: he is so deeply interested in the steamer which is now coming over the smooth waters of the bay. But, having announced that there are a great many people on board, he returns to his discourse.

"Ah'm sure of this, too," says he, "that in the matter of pronunciation the Lowland Scotch have preserved the best English—you can see that *faither* and *twelmonth*, and *twa*, and such words are nearer the original Anglo-Saxon——"

His hearers had been taught to shudder at the phrase Anglo-Saxon—without exactly knowing why. But who could withstand the authority of the Laird? Moreover, we see relief drawing near; the steamer's paddles are throbbing in the still afternoon.

"If ye turn to *Piers the Plowman*," continues the indefatigable Denny-mains, "ye will find Langdale writing—

And a fewe Cruddes and Crayme.

Why, it is the familiar phrase of our Scotch children! Do ye think they would say *curds?* And then, *fewe*. I am not sure, but I imagine we Scotch are only making use of old English when we make certain forms of food plural. We say 'a few broth;' we speak of porridge as 'they.' Perhaps that is a survival, too, eh?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. But please mind the ropes, sir," observes his humble pupil, careful of her master's physical safety. For at this moment the steamer is

slowing in to the quay; and the men have the ropes ready to fling ashore.

"Not," remarks the Laird, prudently backing away from the edge of the pier, "that I would say anything of these matters to your young English friend; certainly not. No doubt she prefers the southern English she has been accustomed to. But, bless me! just to think that she should judge of our Scotch tongue by the way they Edinburgh bodies speak!"

"It is sad, is it not?" remarks his companion—but all her attention is now fixed on the crowd of people swarming to the side of the steamer.

"And, indeed," the Laird explains, to close the subject, "it is only a hobby of mine—only a hobby. Ye may have noticed that I do not use those words in my own speech, though I value them. No, I will not force any Scotch on the young leddy. As ah say, ah have often been taken for an Englishman maself, both at home and abroad."

And now—and now—the great steamer is in at the quay; the gangways are run over; there is a thronging up the paddle-boxes; and eager faces on shore scan equally eager faces on board—each pair of eyes looking for that other pair of eyes to flash a glad recognition. And where is she—the flower of womankind—the possessor of all virtue and grace and courage—the wonder of the world? The Laird shares in our excitement. He, too, scans the crowd eagerly. He submits to be hustled by the porters; he hears nothing of the roaring of the steam; for is she not coming ashore at last? And we know—or guess—that he is looking out for some splendid creature—some Boadicea, with stately tread and imperious mien—some Jephtha's daughter, with proud death in her eyes—some Rosamond of our modern days, with a glory of loveliness on her face and hair. And we know that the master who has been lecturing us for half-an-hour on our disgraceful neglect of pure English will not shock the sensitive Southern

ear by any harsh accent of the North; but will address her in beautiful and courtly strains, in tones such as Edinburgh never knew. Where is the queen of womankind, amid all this commonplace, hurrying, loquacious crowd?

Forthwith the Laird, with a quick amazement in his eyes, sees a small and insignificant person—he only catches a glimpse of a black dress and a white face—suddenly clasped round in the warm embrace of her friend. He stares for a second; and then he exclaims —apparently to himself:—

"Dear me! What a shilpit bit thing!"

Pale—slight—delicate—tiny: surely such a master of idiomatic English cannot have forgotten the existence of these words. But this is all he cries to himself, in his surprise and wonder:—

"Dear me! What a shilpit bit thing!"

CHAPTER II.

MARY AVON.

THE bright, frank laugh of her face!—the friendly, unhesitating, affectionate look in those soft black eyes! He forgot all about Rosamond and Boadicea when he was presented to this "shilpit" person. And when, instead of the usual ceremony of introduction, she bravely put her hand in his, and said she had often heard of him from their common friend, he did not notice that she was rather plain. He did not even stop to consider in what degree her Southern accent might be improved by residence amongst the preservers of pure English. He was anxious to know if she was not greatly tired. He hoped the sea had been smooth

as the steamer came past Easdale. And her luggage —should he look after her luggage for her?

But Miss Avon was an expert traveller, and quite competent to look after her own luggage. Even as he spoke, it was being hoisted on to the waggonette.

"You will let me drive?" says she, eying critically the two shaggy, farm-looking animals.

"Indeed I shall do nothing of the kind," says her hostess, promptly.

But there was no disappointment at all on ner face as we drove away through the golden evening—by the side of the murmuring shore, past the overhanging fir-wood, up and across the high land commanding a view of the wide western seas. There was instead a look of such intense delight that we knew, however silent the lips might be, that the bird-soul was singing within. Everything charmed her—the cool, sweet air, the scent of the sea-weed, the glow on the mountains out there in the west. And as she chattered her delight to us—like a bird escaped from its prison and glad to get into the sunlight and free air again—the Laird sate mute and listened. He watched the frank, bright, expressive face. He followed and responded to her every mood—with a sort of fond paternal indulgence that almost prompted him to take her hand. When she smiled, he laughed. When she talked seriously, he looked concerned. He was entirely forgetting that she was a "shilpit bit thing;" and he would have admitted that the Southern way of speaking English —although, no doubt, fallen away from the traditions of the Northumbrian dialect—had, after all, a certain music in it that made it pleasant to the ear.

Up the hill, then, with a flourish for the last!—the dust rolling away in clouds behind us—the view over the Atlantic widening as we ascend. And here is Castle Osprey, as we have dubbed the place, with its wide open door, and its walls half hidden with tree-fuchsias, and its great rose-garden. Had Fair Rosa-

mond herself come to Castle Osprey that evening, she could not have been waited on with greater solicitude than the Laird showed in assisting this "shilpit bit thing" to alight—though, indeed, there was a slight stumble, of which no one took any notice at the time. He busied himself with her luggage quite unnecessarily. He suggested a cup of tea, though it wanted but fifteen minutes to dinner-time. He assured her that the glass was rising—which was not the case. And when she was being hurried off to her own room to prepare for dinner—by one who rules her household with a rod of iron—he had the effrontery to tell her to take her own time: dinner could wait. The man actually proposed to keep dinner waiting—in Castle Osprey.

That this was love at first sight, who could doubt? And perhaps the nimble brain of one who was at this moment hurriedly dressing in her own room—and whom nature has constituted an indefatigable match-maker—may have been considering whether this rich old bachelor might not marry, after all. And if he were to marry, why should not he marry the young lady in whom he seemed to have taken so sudden and warm an interest? As for her: Mary Avon was now two or three-and-twenty; she was not likely to prove attractive to young men; her small fortune was scarcely worth considering; she was almost alone in the world. Older men had married younger women. The Laird had no immediate relative to inherit Denny-mains and his very substantial fortune. And would they not see plenty of each other on board the yacht?

But in her heart of hearts the schemer knew better. She knew that the romance-chapter in the Laird's life—and a bitter chapter it was—had been finished and closed and put away many and many a year ago. She knew how the great disappointment of his life had failed to sour him; how he was ready to share among friends and companions the large and generous heart

that had been for a time laid at the feet of a jilt; how his keen and active interest, that might have been confined to his children and his children's children, was now devoted to a hundred things—the planting at Denny-mains, the great heresy case, the patronage of young artists, even the preservation of pure English, and what not. And that fortunate young gentleman —ostensibly his nephew—whom he had sent to Harrow and to Cambridge, who was now living a very easy life in the Middle Temple, and who would no doubt come in for Denny-mains? Well, we knew a little about that young man, too. We knew why the Laird, when he found that both the boy's father and mother were dead, adopted him, and educated him, and got him to call him uncle. He had taken under his care the son of the woman who had jilted him five-and-thirty years ago; the lad had his mother's eyes.

And now we are assembled in the drawing-room—all except the new guest; and the glow of the sunset is shining in at the open windows. The Laird is eagerly proving to us that the change from the cold east winds of Edinburgh to the warm westerly winds of the Highlands must make an immediate change in the young lady's face—and declaring that she ought to go on board the yacht at once—and asserting that the ladies' cabin on board the *White Dove* is the most beautiful little cabin he ever saw—when——

When, behold! at the open door—meeting the glow of the sunshine—appears a figure—dressed all in black velvet, plain and unadorned but for a broad belt of gold fringe that comes round the neck and crosses the bosom. And above that again is a lot of white muslin stuff, on which the small, shapely, smooth-dressed head seems gently to rest. The plain black velvet dress gives a certain importance and substantiality to the otherwise slight figure; the broad fringe of gold glints and gleams as she moves towards us; but who can even think of these things when he meets the brave

glance of Mary Avon's eyes? She was humming, as she came down the stair—

O think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa;
For I'll come and see ye in spite o' them a',

—we might have known it was the bird-soul come among us.

Now the manner in which the Laird of Denny-mains set about capturing the affections of this innocent young thing—as he sate opposite her at dinner—would have merited severe reproof in one of less mature age: and might, indeed, have been followed by serious consequences but for the very decided manner in which Miss Avon showed that she could take care of herself. Whoever heard Mary Avon laugh would have been assured. And she did laugh a good deal; for the Laird, determined to amuse her, was relating a series of anecdotes which he called "good ones," and which seemed to have afforded great enjoyment to the people of the south of Scotland during the last century or so. There was in especial a Highland steward of a steamer about whom a vast number of these stories was told; and if the point was at times rather difficult to catch, who could fail to be tickled by the Laird's own and obvious enjoyment? "There was another good one, Miss Avon," he would say; and then the bare memory of the great facetiousness of the anecdote would break out in such half-suppressed guffaws as altogether to stop the current of the narrative. Miss Avon laughed —we could not quite tell whether it was at the Highland steward or the Laird—until the tears ran down her cheeks. Dinner was scarcely thought of. It was a disgraceful exhibition.

"There was another good one about Homesh," said the Laird, vainly endeavouring to suppress his laughter. "He came up on deck one enormously hot day, and looked ashore, and saw some cattle standing knee-deep in a pool of water. Says he—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho!

ho !—says he—says he—'*A wish a wass a stot!*'—he ! he ! he !—ho ! ho ! ho !"

Of course we all laughed heartily, and Mary Avon more than any of us; but if she had gone down on her knees and sworn that she knew what the point of the story was, we should not have believed her. But the Laird was delighted. He went on with his good ones. The mythical Homesh and his idiotic adventures became portentous. The very servants could scarcely carry the dishes straight.

But in the midst of it all the Laird suddenly let his knife and fork drop on his plate, and stared. Then he quickly exclaimed—

"Bless me ! lassie !"

We saw in a second what had occasioned his alarm. The girl's face had become ghastly white; and she was almost falling away from her chair when her hostess, who happened to spring to her feet first, caught her, and held her, and called for water. What could it mean? Mary Avon was not of the sighing and fainting fraternity.

And presently she came to herself—and faintly making apologies, would go from the room. It was her ankle, she murmured—with the face still white from pain. But when she tried to rise, she fell back again: the agony was too great. And so we had to carry her.

About ten minutes thereafter the mistress of the house came back to the Laird, who had been sitting by himself, in great concern.

"That girl! that girl!" she exclaims—and one might almost imagine there are tears in her eyes. "Can you fancy such a thing! She twists her ankle in getting down from the waggonette—brings back the old sprain—perhaps lames herself for life—and, in spite of the pain, sits here laughing and joking, so that she may not spoil our first evening together! Did you ever hear of such a thing! Sitting here laughing,

with her ankle swelled so that I had to cut the boot off!"

"Gracious me!" says the Laird; "is it as bad as that?"

"And if she should become permanently lame—why—why——"

But was she going to make an appeal direct to the owner of Denny-mains? If the younger men were not likely to marry a lame little white-faced girl, that was none of his business. The Laird's marrying days had departed five-and-thirty years before.

However, we had to finish our dinner, somehow, in consideration to our elder guest. And then the surgeon came; and bound up the ankle hard and fast; and Miss Avon, with a thousand meek apologies for being so stupid, declared again and again that her foot would be all right in the morning, and that we must get ready to start. And when her friend assured her that this preliminary canter of the yacht might just as well be put off for a few days—until, for example, that young doctor from Edinburgh came who had been invited to go a proper cruise with us—her distress was so great that we had to promise to start next day punctually at ten. So she sent us down again to amuse the Laird.

But hark! what is this we hear just as Denny-mains is having his whisky and hot water brought in? It is a gay voice humming on the stairs—

By the margin of fair Zürich's waters.

"That girl!" cries her hostess angrily, as she jumps to her feet.

The door opens; and here is Mary Avon, with calm self-possession, making her way to a chair.

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," she says coolly, "if I did not come down. I tell you my foot is as well as may be; and Dot-and-carry-one will get down to the yacht in the morning as easily as any of you.

And that last story about Homesh," she says to the Laird, with a smile in the soft black eyes that must have made his heart jump. "Really, sir, you must tell me the ending of that story; it was so stupid of me!"

"Shilpit" she may have been; but the Laird, for one, was beginning to believe that this girl had the courage and nerve of a dozen men.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER WAY.

THE first eager glance out on this brilliant and beautiful morning; and behold! it is all a wonder of blue seas and blue skies that we find before us, with Lismore lying golden-green in the sunlight, and the great mountains of Mull and Morven shining with the pale etherial colours of the dawn. And what are the rhymes that are ringing through one's brain—the echo perchance of something heard far away among the islands—the islands that await our coming in the west?—

O land of red heather!
O land of wild weather,
And the cry of the waves, and the laugh of the breeze!
O love, now, together
Through the wind and wild weather
We spread our white sails to encounter the seas!

Up and out, laggards, now; and hoist this big red and blue and white thing up to the head of the tall pole that the lads far below may know to send the gig ashore for us! And there, on the ruffled blue waters

of the bay, behold! the noble *White Dove*, with her great mainsail, and mizzen, and jib, all set and glowing in the sun; and the scarlet caps of the men are like points of fire in this fair blue picture; and the red ensign is fluttering in the light north-westerly breeze. Breakfast is hurried over; and a small person who has a passion for flowers is dashing hither and thither in the garden until she has amassed an armful of our old familiar friends—abundant roses, fuchsias, heart's-ease, various coloured columbine, and masses of southernwood to scent our floating saloon; the waggonette is at the door, to take our invalid down to the landing-slip; and the Laird has discarded his dignified costume, and appears in a shooting-coat and a vast gray wide-awake. As for Mary Avon, she is laughing, chatting, singing, here, there, and everywhere—giving us to understand that a sprained ankle is rather a pleasure than otherwise, and a great assistance in walking; until the Laird pounces upon her—as one might pounce on a butterfly—and imprisons her in the waggonette, with many a serious warning about her imprudence. There let her sing to herself as she likes—amid the wild confusion of things forgotten till the last moment and thrust upon us just as we start.

And here is the stalwart and brown-bearded Captain John—John of Skye we call him—himself come ashore in the gig, in all his splendour of blue and brass buttons; and he takes off his peaked cap to the mistress of our household—whom some of her friends call Queen Titania, because of her midge-like size—and he says to her with a smile—

"And will Mrs. —— herself be going with us this time?"

That is Captain John's chief concern: for he has a great regard for this domineering small woman; and shows his respect for her, and his own high notions of courtesy, by invariably addressing her in the third person.

"Oh, yes, John!" says she—and she can look pleasant enough when she likes—"and this is a young friend of mine, Miss Avon, whom you have to take great care of on board."

And Captain John takes off his cap again; and is understood to tell the young lady that he will do his best, if she will excuse his not knowing much English. Then, with great care, and with some difficulty, Miss Avon is assisted down from the waggonette, and conducted along the rough little landing-slip, and helped into the stern of the shapely and shining gig. Away with her, boys! The splash of the oars is heard in the still bay; the shore recedes; the white sails seem to rise higher into the blue sky as we near the yacht; here is the black hull with its line of gold—the gangway open—the ropes ready—the white decks brilliant in the sun. We are on board at last.

"And where will Mr. —— himself be for going?" asks John of Skye, as the men are hauling the gig up to the davits.

Mr. —— briefly but seriously explains to the captain that, from some slight experience of the winds on this coast, he has found it of about as much use to order the tides to be changed as to settle upon any definite route. But he suggests the circumnavigation of the adjacent island of Mull as a sort of preliminary canter for a few days, until a certain notable guest shall arrive; and he would prefer going by the south, if the honourable winds will permit. Further, John of Skye, is not to be afraid of a bit of sea, on account of either of those ladies; both are excellent sailors. With these somewhat vague instructions, Captain John is left to get the yacht under way; and we go below to look after the stowage of our things in the various staterooms.

And what is this violent altercation going on, in the saloon?

"I will not have a word said against my captain,"

says Mary Avon. "I am in love with him already. His English is perfectly correct."

This impertinent minx talking about correct English in the presence of the Laird of Denny-mains!

"'Mrs. —— herself' is perfectly correct; it is only politeness; it is like saying 'Your Grace' to a Duke."

But who was denying it? Surely not the imperious little woman who was arranging her flowers on the saloon table; nor yet Denny-mains, who was examining a box of variegated and recondite fishing-tackle?

"It is all very well for fine ladies to laugh at the blunders of servant maids," continues this audacious girl. "'Miss Brown presents her compliments to Miss Smith; and would you be so kind,' and so on. But don't they often make the same blunder themselves?"

Well, this was a discovery!

"Doesn't Mrs. So-and-So request the honour of the company of Mr. So-and-So or Miss So-and-So for some purpose or other; and then you find at one corner of the card '*R. S. V. P.?*' 'Answer if you please'!"

A painful silence prevailed. We began to reflect. Whom did she mean to charge with this deadly crime?

But her triumph makes her considerate. She will not harry us with scorn.

"It is becoming far less common now, however," she remarks. "'An answer is requested,' is much more sensible."

"It is English," says the Laird, with decision. "Surely it must be more sensible for an English person to write English. Ah never use a French word maself."

But what is the English that we hear now—called out on deck by the voice of John of Skye?

"Eachan, slack the lee topping-lift! Ay, and the tackle, too. That'll do, boys. Down with your main-tack, now!"

"Why," exclaims our sovereign mistress, who knows something of nautical matters, "we must have started!"

Then there is a tumbling up the companion-way; and lo! the land is slowly leaving us; and there is a lapping of the blue water along the side of the boat; and the white sails of the *White Dove* are filled with this gentle breeze. Deck-stools are arranged; books and field-glasses and what not scattered about; Mary Avon is helped on deck, and ensconced in a snug little camp-chair. The days of our summer idleness have begun.

And as yet these are but familiar scenes that steal slowly by—the long green island of Lismore—*Lios-mor*, the Great Garden; the dark ruins of Duart, sombre as if the shadow of nameless tragedies rested on the crumbling walls; Loch Don, with its sea-bird haunted shallows, and Loch Speliv leading up to the awful solitudes of Glen More; then, stretching far into the wreathing clouds, the long rampart of precipices, rugged and barren and lonely, that form the eastern wall of Mull.

There is no monotony on this beautiful summer morning; the scene changes every moment, as the light breeze bears us away to the south. For there is the Sheep Island; and Garveloch—which is the rough island; and Eilean-na-naomha—which is the island of the Saints. But what are these to the small transparent cloud resting on the horizon?—smaller than any man's hand. The day is still; and the seas are smooth: cannot we hear the mermaiden singing on the far shores of Colonsay?

"Colonsay!" exclaims the Laird, seizing a field-glass. "Dear me! is that Colonsay? And they telled me that Tom Galbraith was going there this very year."

The piece of news fails to startle us altogether; though we have heard the Laird speak of Mr. Galbraith before.

"Ay," says he, "the world will know something o' Colonsay when Tom Galbraith gets there."

"Whom did you say?" Miss Avon asks.

"Why, Galbraith!" says he. "Tom Galbraith!"

The Laird stares in amazement. Is it possible she has not heard of Tom Galbraith? And she herself an artist; and coming direct from Edinburgh, where she has been living for two whole months!

"Gracious me!" says the Laird. "Ye do not say ye have never heard of Galbraith—he's an Academeecian!—a Scottish Academeecian!"

"Oh, yes; no doubt," she says, rather bewildered.

"There is no one living has had such an influence on our Scotch school of painters as Galbraith—a man of great abeelity—a man of great and uncommon abeelity—he is one of the most famous landscape painters of our day——"

"I scarcely met any one in Edinburgh," she pleads.

"But in London—in London!" exclaims the astonished Laird. "Do ye mean to say you never heard o' Tom Galbraith?"

"I—I think not," she confesses. "I—I don't remember his name in the Academy catalogue——"

"The Royal Academy!" cries the Laird, with scorn. "No, no! Ye need not expect that. The English Academy is afraid of the Scotchmen: their pictures are too strong: you do not put good honest whisky beside small beer. I say the English Academy is afraid of the Scotch school——"

But flesh and blood can stand this no longer: we shall not have Mary Avon trampled upon.

"Look here, Denny-mains: we always thought there was a Scotchman or two in the Royal Academy itself—and quite capable of holding their own there, too. Why, the President of the Academy is a Scotchman! And as for the Academy exhibition, the very walls are smothered with Scotch hills, Scotch spates, Scotch peasants, to say nothing of the thousand herring-smacks of Tarbert."

"I tell ye they are afraid of Tom Galbraith; they will not exhibit one of his pictures," says the Laird

stubbornly; and here the discussion is closed; for Master Fred tinkles his bell below, and we have to go down for luncheon.

It was most unfair of the wind to take advantage of our absence, and to sneak off, leaving us in a dead calm. It was all very well, when we came on deck again, to watch the terns darting about in their swallow-like fashion, and swooping down to seize a fish; and the strings of sea-pyots whirring by, with their scarlet beaks and legs; and the sudden shimmer and hissing of a part of the blue plain, where a shoal of mackerel had come to the surface; but where were we, now in the open Atlantic, to pass the night? We relinquished the doubling of the Ross of Mull; we should have been content—more than content, for the sake of auld lang syne—to have put into Carsaig; we were beginning even to have ignominious thoughts of Loch Buy. And yet we let the golden evening draw on with comparative resignation; and we watched the colour gathering in the west, and the Atlantic taking darker hues, and a ruddy tinge beginning to tell on the seamed ridges of Garveloch and the isle of Saints. When the wind sprung up again—it had backed to due west, and we had to beat against it with a series of long tacks, that took us down within sight of Islay and back to Mull apparently all for nothing—we were deeply engaged in prophesying all manner of things to be achieved by one Angus Sutherland, an old friend of ours, though yet a young man enough.

"Just fancy, sir!" says our hostess to the Laird—the Laird, by the way, does not seem so enthusiastic as the rest of us, when he hears that this hero of modern days is about to join our party. "What he has done beats all that I ever heard about Scotch University students; and you know what some of them have accomplished in the face of difficulties. His father is a minister in some small place in Banffshire; perhaps he has 200*l.* a year at the outside.

This son of his has not cost him a farthing, for either his maintenance or his education, since he was fourteen; he took bursaries, scholarships, I don't know what, when he was a mere lad; supported himself and travelled all over Europe—but I think it was at Leipsic and at Vienna he studied longest; and the papers he has written—the lectures—and the correspondence with all the great scientific people—when they made him a Fellow, all he said was, 'I wish my mother was alive.'"

This was rather an incoherent and jumbled account of a young man's career.

"A Fellow of what?" says the Laird.

"A Fellow of the Royal Society! They made him a Fellow of the Royal Society last year! And he is only seven-and-twenty! I do believe he was not over one-and-twenty when he took his degree at Edinburgh. And then—and then—there is really nothing that he doesn't know: is there, Mary?"

This sudden appeal causes Mary Avon to flush slightly; but she says demurely, looking down—

"Of course I don't know anything that he doesn't know."

"Hm!" says the Laird, who does not seem over pleased. "I have observed that young men who are too brilliant at the first, seldom come to much afterwards. Has he gained anything substantial? Has he a good practice? Does he keep his carriage yet?"

"No, no!" says our hostess, with a fine contempt for such things. "He has a higher ambition than that. His practice is almost nothing. He prefers to sacrifice that in the mean time. But his reputation—among the scientific—why—why, it is European!"

"Hm!" says the Laird. "I have sometimes seen that persons who gave themselves up to erudeetion, lost the character of human beings altogether. They become scientific machines. The world is just made up of books for them—and lectures—they would not

give a halfpenny to a beggar for fear of poleetical economy——"

"Oh, how can you say such a thing of Angus Sutherland!" says she—though he has said no such thing of Angus Sutherland. "Why, here is this girl who goes to Edinburgh—all by herself—to nurse an old woman in her last illness; and as Angus Sutherland is in Edinburgh on some business—connected with the University, I believe—I ask him to call on her and see if he can give her any advice. What does he do? He stops in Edinburgh two months—editing that scientific magazine there instead of in London—and all because he has taken an interest in the old woman, and thinks that Mary should not have the whole responsibility on her shoulders. Is that like a scientific machine?"

"No," says the Laird, with a certain calm grandeur; "you do not often find young men doing that for the sake of an old woman." But of course we don't know what he means.

"And I am so glad he is coming to us!" she says, with real delight in her face. "We shall take him away from his microscopes, and his societies, and all that. Oh, and he is such a delightful companion—so simple, and natural, and straightforward! Don't you think so, Mary?"

Mary Avon is understood to assent: she does not say much—she is so deeply interested in a couple of porpoises that appear from time to time on the smooth plain on the sea.

"I am sure a long holiday would do him a world of good," says this eager hostess; "but that is too much to expect. He is always too busy. I think he has got to go over to Italy soon, about some exhibition of surgical instruments, or something of that sort."

We had plenty of further talk about Dr. Sutherland, and of the wonderful future that lay before him, that evening before we finally put into Loch Buy. And

there we dined; and after dinner we found the wan, clear twilight filling the northern heavens, over the black range of mountains, and throwing a silver glare on the smooth sea around us. We could have read on deck at eleven at night—had that been necessary; but Mary Avon was humming snatches of songs to us, and the Laird was discoursing of the wonderful influence exerted on Scotch landscape-art by Tom Galbraith. Then in the south the yellow moon rose; and a golden lane of light lay on the sea, from the horizon across to the side of the yacht; and there was a strange glory on the decks and on the tall, smooth masts. The peace of that night!—the soft air, the silence, the dreamy lapping of the water!

"And whatever lies before Angus Sutherland," says one of us—"whether a baronetcy, or a big fortune, or marriage with an Italian princess—he won't find anything better than sailing in the *White Dove* among the western islands."

CHAPTER IV.

A MESSAGE.

WHAT fierce commotion is this that awakes us in the morning—what pandemonium broken loose of wild storm-sounds—with the stately *White Dove*, ordinarily the most sedate and gentle of her sex, apparently gone mad, and flinging herself about as if bent on somersaults? When one clambers up the companion-way, clinging hard, and puts one's head out into the gale, behold! there is not a trace of land visible anywhere—nothing but whirling clouds of mist and rain; and mountain-masses of waves that toss the *White Dove*

about as if she were a plaything; and decks all running wet with the driven spray. John of Skye, clad from head to heel in black oilskins—and at one moment up in the clouds, the next moment descending into the great trough of the sea—hangs on to the rope that is twisted round the tiller; and laughs a good-morning; and shakes the salt water from his shaggy eyebrows and beard.

"Hallo! John—where on earth have we got to?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I say WHERE ARE WE?" is shouted, for the roar of the rushing Atlantic is deafening.

"'Deed I not think we are far from Loch Buy," says John of Skye, grimly. "The wind is dead ahead of us—ay, shist dead ahead!"

"What made you come out against a head-wind then?"

"When we cam' out," says John—picking his English, "the wind will be from the norse—ay, a fine light breeze from the norse. And will Mr. —— himself be for going on now? it is a ferry bad sea for the leddies—a ferry coorse sea."

But it appears that this conversation—bawled aloud—has been overheard. There are voices from below. The skylight of the ladies' cabin is partly open.

"Don't mind us," calls Mary Avon. "Go on by all means!"

The other voice calls—

"Why can't you keep this fool of a boat straight? Ask him when we shall be into the Sound of Iona."

One might as well ask him when we shall be into the Sound of Jericho or Jerusalem. With half a gale of wind right in our teeth, and with the heavy Atlantic swell running, we might labour here all day—and all the night too—without getting round the Ross of Mull. There is nothing for it but to turn and run, that we may have our breakfast in peace. Let her away, then, you brave John of Skye!—slack out the main-sheet,

and give her plenty of it, too: then at the same moment Sandy from Islay perceives that a haul at the weather topping-lift will clear the boom from the davits; and now—and now, good Master Fred—our much-esteemed and shifty Friedrich d'or—if you will but lay the cloth on the table, we will help you to steady the dancing phantasmagoria of plates and forks!

"Dear me!" says the Laird, when we are assembled together, "it has been an awful night!"

"Oh, I hope you have not been ill!" says his hostess, with a quick concern in the soft clear eyes.

He does not look as if he had suffered much. He is contentedly chipping an egg; and withal keeping an eye on the things near him, for the *White Dove*, still plunging a good deal, threatens at times to make of everything on the table a movable feast.

"Oh no, Ma'am, not ill," he says. "But at my time of life, ye see, one is not as light in weight as one used to be; and the way I was flung about in that cabin last night was just extraordinary. When I was trying to put on my boots this morning, I am sure I resembled nothing so much as a pea in a bladder—indeed it was so—I was knocked about like a pea in a bladder."

Of course we expressed great sympathy, and assured him that the *White Dove*—famed all along this coast for her sober and steady-going behaviour—would never act so any more.

"However," said he thoughtfully, "the wakefulness of the night is often of use to people. Yes, I have come to a decision."

We were somewhat alarmed: was he going to leave us merely because of this bit of tossing?

"I dare say ye know, ma'am," says he slowly, "that I am one of the Commissioners of the Burgh of Strathgovan. It is a poseetion of grave responsibility. This very question now—about our getting a steam fire-engine—has been weighing on my mind for many a

day. Well, I have decided I will no longer oppose it. They may have the steam fire-engine as far as I am concerned."

We felt greatly relieved.

"Yes," continued the Laird, solemnly, "I think I am doing my duty in this matter as a public man should—laying aside his personal prejudice. But the cost of it! Do ye know that we shall want bigger nozzles to all the fire-plugs?"

Matters were looking grave again.

"However," said the Laird cheerfully—for he would not depress us too much, "it may all turn out for the best; and I will telegraph my decision to Strathgovan as soon as ever the storm allows us to reach a port."

The storm, indeed! When we scramble up on deck again, we find that it is only a brisk sailing breeze we have; and the *White Dove* is bowling merrily along, flinging high the white spray from her bows. And then we begin to see that, despite those driving mists around us, there is really a fine clear summer day shining far above this twopenny-halfpenny tempest. The whirling mists break here and there; and we catch glimpses of a placid blue sky, flecked with lines of motionless cirrhus cloud. The breaks increase; floods of sunshine fall on the gleaming decks; clearer and clearer become the vast precipices of southern Mull; and then, when we get well to the lee of Eilean-straid-ean, behold! the blue seas around us once more; and the blue skies overhead; and the red ensign fluttering in the summer breeze. No wonder that Mary Avon sings her delight—as a linnet sings after the rain; and though the song is not meant for us at all, but is really hummed to herself as she clings on to the shrouds and watches the flashing and dipping of the white-winged gulls, we know that it is all about a jolly young waterman. The audacious creature: John of Skye has a wife and four children.

Too quickly indeed does the fair summer day go by

—as we pass the old familiar Duart and begin to beat up the Sound of Mull against a fine light sailing breeze. By the time we have reached Ardtornish, the Laird has acquired some vague notion as to how the gaff topsail is set. Opposite the dark-green woods of Funeray, he tells of the extraordinary faculty possessed by Tom Galbraith of representing the texture of foliage. At Salen we have Master Fred's bell summoning us down to lunch; and thereafter, on deck, coffee, draughts, crochet, and a profoundly interesting description of some of the knotty points in the great Semple heresy case. And here again, as we bear away over almost to the mouth of Loch Sunart, is the open Atlantic—of a breezy grey under the lemon-colour and silver of the calm evening sky. What is the use of going on against this contrary wind, and missing, in the darkness of the night, all the wonders of the western islands that the Laird is anxious to see? We resolve to run into Tobermory; and by and by we find ourselves under the shadow of the wooded rocks, with the little white town shining along the semicircle of the bay. And very cleverly indeed does John of Skye cut in among the various craft—showing off a little bit, perhaps—until the *White Dove* is brought up to the wind, and the great anchor-cable goes out with a roar.

Now it was by the merest accident that we got at Tobermory a telegram that had been forwarded that very day to meet us on our return voyage. There was no need for any one to go ashore, for we were scarcely in port before a most praiseworthy gentleman was so kind as to send us on board a consignment of fresh flowers, vegetables, milk, eggs, and so forth—the very things that become of inestimable value to yachting people. However, we had two women on board; and of course—despite a certain bandaged ankle—they must needs go shopping. And Mary Avon, when we got ashore, would buy some tobacco for her favourite Captain John; and went into the post-office for that

purpose, and was having the black stuff measured out by the yard when some mention was made of the *White Dove*. Then a question was asked; there was a telegram; it was handed to Miss Avon, who opened it and read it.

"Oh!" said she, looking rather concerned; and then she regarded her friend with some little hesitation.

"It is my uncle," she says; "he wants to see me on very urgent business. He is—coming—to see me —the day after to-morrow."

Blank consternation followed this announcement. This person, even though he was Mary Avon's sole surviving relative, was quite intolerable to us. East Wind we had called him in secret, on the few occasions on which he had darkened our doors. And just as we were making up our happy family party—with the Laird, and Mary, and Angus Sutherland—to sail away to the far Hebrides, here was this insufferable creature —with his raucous voice, his washed-out eyes, his pink face, his uneasy manner, and general groom or butler-like appearance—thrusting himself on us!

"Well, you know, Mary," says her hostess—entirely concealing her dismay in her anxious politeness—"we shall almost certainly be home by the day after to-morrow, if we get any wind at all. So you had better telegraph to your uncle to come on to Castle Osprey, and to wait for you if you are not there; we cannot be much longer than that. And Angus Sutherland will be there; he will keep him company until we arrive."

So that was done, and we went on board again—one of us meanwhile vowing to himself that ere ever Mr. Frederick Smethurst set sail with us on board the *White Dove*, a rifle-bullet through her hull would send that gallant vessel to the lobsters.

Now what do you think our Mary Avon set to work to do—all during this beautiful summer evening, as we sat on deck and eyed curiously the other craft in

the bay, or watched the firs grow dark against the silver-yellow twilight? We could not at first make out what she was driving at. Her occupation in the world, so far as she had any—beyond being the pleasantest of companions and the faithfullest of friends—was the painting of landscapes in oil, not the construction of Frankenstein monsters. But here she begins by declaring to us that there is one type of character that has never been described by any satirist, or dramatist, or fictionist—a common type, too, though only becoming pronounced in rare instances. It is the moral Tartuffe, she declares—the person who is through and through a hypocrite, not to cloak evil doings, but only that his eager love of approbation may be gratified. Look now how this creature of diseased vanity, of plausible manners, of pretentious humbug, rises out of the smoke like the figure summoned by a wizard's wand! As she gives us little touches here and there of the ways of this professor of *bonhomie*—this bundle of affectations—we begin to prefer the most diabolical villainy that any thousand of the really wicked Tartuffes could have committed. He grows and grows. His scraps of learning, as long as those more ignorant than himself are his audience; his mock humility anxious for praise; his parade of generous and sententious sentiment; his pretence—pretence—pretence—all arising from no evil machinations whatever, but from a morbid and restless craving for esteem. Hence, horrible shadow! Let us put out the candles and get to bed.

But next morning, as we find ourselves out on the blue Atlantic again, with Ru-na-Gaul lighthouse left far behind, and the pale line of Coll at the horizon, we begin to see why the skill and patient assiduity of this amateur psychologist should have raised that ghost for us the night before. Her uncle is coming. He is not one of the plausible kind. And if it should be necessary to invite him on board, might we not the more

readily tolerate his cynical bluntness and rudeness, after we have been taught to abhor as the hatefullest of mortals the well-meaning hypocrite whose vanity makes his life a bundle of small lies? Very clever indeed, Miss Avon—very clever. But don't you raise any more ghosts; they are unpleasant company—even as an antidote.

And now, John of Skye, if it must be that we are to encounter this pestilent creature at the end of our voyage, clap on all sail now, and take us right royally down through these far islands of the west. Ah! do we not know them of old? Soon as we get round the Cailleach Point we descry the nearest of them amid the loneliness of the wide Atlantic sea. For there is Carnaburg, with her spur of rock; and Fladda, long and rugged, and bare; and Lunga, with her peak; and the Dutchman's Cap—a pale blue in the south. How bravely the *White Dove* swings on her way—springing like a bird over the western swell! And as we get past Ru-Treshnish, behold! another group of islands—Gometra and the green-shored Ulva, that guard the entrance to Loch Tua; and Colonsay, the haunt of the sea birds; and the rock of Erisgeir—all shining in the sun. And then we hear a strange sound—different from the light rush of the waves—a low, and sullen, and distant booming, such as one faintly hears in a sea-shell. As the *White Dove* ploughs on her way, we come nearer and nearer to this wonder of the deep—the ribbed and fantastic shores of Staffa; and we see how the great Atlantic rollers, making for the cliffs of Gribun and Burg, are caught by those outer rocks and torn into masses of white foam, and sent roaring and thundering into the blackness of the caves. We pass close by; the air trembles with the shock of that mighty surge; there is a mist of spray rising into the summer air. And then we sail away again; and the day wears on as the white-winged *White Dove* bounds over the heavy seas; and Mary Avon—as we

draw near the Ross of Mull, all glowing in the golden evening—is singing a song of Ulva.

But there is no time for romance, as the *White Dove* (drawing eight feet of water) makes in for the shallow harbour outside Bunessan.

"Down foresail!" calls out our John of Skye; and by and by her head comes up to the wind, the great mainsail flapping in the breeze. And again, "Down chub, boys!" and there is another rattle and roar amid the silence of this solitary little bay. The herons croak their fright and fly away on heavy wing; the curlews whistle shrilly; the sea-pyots whirr along the lonely shores. And then our good Friedrich d'or sounds his silver-toned bell.

The stillness of this summer evening on deck; the glory deepening over the wide Atlantic; the delightful laughter of the Laird over those "good ones" about Homesh; the sympathetic glance of Mary Avon's soft black eyes: did we not value them all the more that we knew we had something far different to look forward to? Even as we idled away the beautiful and lambent night, we had a vague consciousness that our enemy was stealthily drawing near. In a day or two at the most we should find the grim spectre of the East Wind in the rose-garden of Castle Osprey.

CHAPTER V.

A BRAVE CAREER.

But when we went on deck the next morning we forgot all about the detestable person who was about to break in upon our peace (there was small chance that our faithful Angus Sutherland might encounter the snake in this summer paradise, and trample on

him, and pitch him out; for this easy way of getting rid of disagreeable folk is not permitted in the Highlands nowadays) as we looked on the beautiful bay shining all around us.

"Dear me!" said Denny-mains, "if Tom Galbraith could only see that now! It is a great peety he has never been to this place. I'm thinking I must write to him."

The Laird did not remember that we had an artist on board—one who, if she was not so great an artist as Mr. Galbraith, had at least exhibited one or two small landscapes in oil at the Royal Academy. But then the Academicians, though they might dread the contrast between their own work and that of Tom Galbraith, could have no fear of Mary Avon.

And even Mr. Galbraith himself might have been puzzled to find among his pigments any equivalent for the rare and clear colours of this morning scene as now we sailed away from Bunessan with a light topsail breeze. How blue the day was—blue skies, blue seas, a faint, transparent blue along the cliffs of Burg and Gribun, a darker blue where the far Ru-Treshanish ran out into the sea, a shadow of blue to mark where the caves of Staffa retreated from the surface of the sun-brown rocks! And here, nearer at hand, the warmer colours of the shore—the soft, velvety olive-greens of the moss and breckan; the splashes of lilac where the rocks were bare of herbage; the tender sunny reds where the granite promontories ran out to the sea; the beautiful cream-whites of the sandy bays! Here, too, are the islands again as we get out into the open—Gometra, with its one white house at the point; and Inch Kenneth, where the seals show their shining black heads among the shallows; and Erisgeir and Colonsay, where the skarts alight to dry their wings on the rocks; and Staffa, and Lunga, and the Dutchman, lying peaceful enough now on the calm blue seas. We have time to look at them, for the wind is slight,

and the broad-beamed *White Dove* is not a quick sailer in a light breeze. The best part of the forenoon is over before we find ourselves opposite to the gleaming white sands of the northern bays of Iona.

"But surely both of us together will be able to make him stay longer than ten days," says the elder of the two women to the younger—and you may be sure she was not speaking of East Wind.

Mary Avon looks up with a start; then looks down again—perhaps with the least touch of colour in her face—as she says hurriedly—

"Oh, I think you will. He is your friend. As for me—you see—I—I scarcely know him."

"Oh, Mary!" says the other reproachfully. "You have been meeting him constantly all these two months; you must know him better than any of us. I am sure I wish he was on board now—he could tell us all about the geology of the islands, and what not. It will be delightful to have somebody on board who knows something."

Such is the gratitude of women!—and the Laird had just been describing to her some further points of the famous heresy case.

"And then he knows Gaelic!" says the elder woman. "He will tell us what all the names of the islands mean."

"Oh, yes," says the younger one, "he understands Gaelic very well, though he cannot speak much of it."

"And I think he is very fond of boats," remarks our hostess.

"Oh, exceedingly—exceedingly!" says the other, who, if she does not know Angus Sutherland, seems to have picked up some information about him somehow. "You cannot imagine how he has been looking forward to sailing with you; he has scarcely had any holiday for years."

"Then he must stay longer than ten days," says the elder woman; adding with a smile, "you know, Mary,

it is not the number of his patients that will hurry him back to London."

"Oh, but I assure you," says Miss Avon seriously, "that he is not at all anxious to have many patients—as yet! Oh, no!—I never knew any one who was so indifferent about money. I know he would live on bread and water—if that were necessary—to go on with his researches. He told me himself that all the time he was at Leipsic his expenses were never more than 1*l.* a week."

She seemed to know a good deal about the circumstances of this young F.R.S.

"Look at what he has done with those anæsthetics," continues Miss Avon. "Isn't it better to find out something that does good to the whole world than give yourself up to making money by wheedling a lot of old women?"

This estimate of the physician's art was not flattering.

"But," she says warmly, "if the Government had any sense, that is just the sort of man they would put in a position to go on with his invaluable work. And Oxford and Cambridge, with all their wealth, they scarcely even recognise the noblest profession that a man can devote himself to—when even the poor Scotch Universities and the Universities all over Europe have always had their medical and scientific chairs. I think it is perfectly disgraceful!"

Since when had she become so strenuous an advocate of the endowment of research?

"Why, look at Dr. Sutherland—when he is burning to get on with his own proper work—when his name is beginning to be known all over Europe—he has to fritter away his time in editing a scientific magazine and in those hospital lectures. And that, I suppose, is barely enough to live on. But I know," she says, with decision, "that in spite of everything—I know that before he is five-and-thirty, he will be President of the British Association."

Here, indeed, is a brave career for the Scotch student: cannot one complete the sketch as it roughly exists in the minds of those two women?

At twenty-one, B.M. of Edinburgh.

At twenty-six, F.R.S.

At thirty, Professor of Biology at Oxford. the chair founded through the intercession of the women of Great Britain.

At thirty-five, President of the British Association.

At forty, a baronetcy, for further discoveries in the region of anæsthetics.

At forty-five, consulting physician to half the gouty old gentlemen of England, and amassing an immense fortune.

At fifty——

Well, at fifty, is it not time that "the poor Scotch student," now become great and famous and wealthy, should look around for some beautiful princess to share his high estate with him? He has not had time before to think of such matters. But what is this now? Is it that microscopes and test-tubes have dimmed his eyes? Is it that honours and responsibilities have silvered his hair? Or, is the drinking deep of the Pactolus stream a deadly poison? There is no beautiful princess—awaiting him anywhere. He is alone among his honours. There was once a beautiful princess — beautiful-souled and tender-eyed, if not otherwise too lovely—awaiting him among the Western Seas; but that time is over and gone many a year ago. The opportunity has passed. Ambition called him away, and he left her; and the last he saw of her was when he bade good-bye to the *White Dove*.

What have we to do with these idle dreams? We are getting within sight of Iona village now; and the sun is shining on the green shores, and on the ruins of the old cathedral, and on that white house just above the corn-field. And as there is no good anchorage about the island, we have to make in for a little creek on the

Mull side of the Sound, called Polterriv, or the Bull-hole; and this creek is narrow, tortuous, and shallow; and a yacht drawing eight feet of water has to be guided with some circumspection—especially if you go up to the inner harbour above the rock called the little bull. And so we make inquiries of John of Skye, who has not been with us here before. It is even hinted, that if he is not quite sure of the channel, we might send the gig over to Iona for John Macdonald, who is an excellent pilot.

"John Macdonald!" exclaims John of Skye, whose professional pride has been wounded. "Will John Macdonald be doing anything more than I wass do myself in the Bull-hole—ay, last year—last year I will tek my own smack out of the Bull-hole at the norse end, and ferry near low water, too; and her deep-loaded? Oh, yes, I will be knowing the Bull-hole this many a year."

And John of Skye is as good as his word. Favoured by a flood-tide, we steal gently into the unfrequented creek, behind the great rocks of red granite; and so extraordinarily clear is the water that, standing upright on the deck, we can see the white sand of the bottom with shoals of young saithe darting this way and that. And then just as we get opposite an opening in the rocks, through which we can descry the northern shores of Iona, and above those the blue peak of the Dutchman, away goes the anchor with a short, quick rush; her head swings round to meet the tide; the *White Dove* is safe from all the winds that blow. Now lower away the gig, boys, and bear us over the blue waters of the Sound!

"I am really afraid to begin," Mary Avon says, as we remonstrate with her for not having touched a colour-tube since she started. "Besides, you know, I scarcely look on it that we have really set out yet. This is only a sort of shaking ourselves into our places; I am only getting accustomed to the ways of our cabin

now. I shall scarcely consider that we have started on our real voyaging until——"

Oh, yes, we know very well. Until we have got Angus Sutherland on board. But what she really said was, after slight hesitation:

"——until we set out for the Northern Hebrides."

"Ay, it's a good thing to feel nervous about beginning," says the Laird, as the long sweep of the four oars brings us nearer and nearer to the Iona shores. "I have often heard Tom Galbraith say that to the younger men. He says if a young man is over-confident, he'll come to nothing. But there was a good one I once heard Galbraith tell about a young man that was pentin at Tarbert—that's Tarbert on Loch Fyne, Miss Avon. Ay, well, he was pentin away, and he was putting in the young lass of the house as a fisher-lass; and he asked her if she could not get a creel to strap on her back, as a background for her head, ye know. Well, says she——"

Here the fierce humour of the story began to bubble up in the Laird's blue-grey eyes. We were all half aughing already. It was impossible to resist the glow of delight on the Laird's face.

"Says she—just as pat as ninepence—says she, 'it's your ain head that wants a creel!'"

The explosion was inevitable. The roar of laughter at this good one was so infectious that a subdued smile played over the rugged features of John of Skye. "*It's your ain head that wants a creel:*" the Laird laughed, and laughed again, until the last desperately suppressed sounds were something like *kee! kee! kee!* Even Mary Avon pretended to understand.

"There was a real good one," says he, obviously overjoyed to have so appreciative an audience, "that I mind of reading in the Dean's *Reminiscences*. It was about an old leddy in Edinburgh who met in a shop a young officer she had seen before. He was a tall young man, and she eyed him from head to heel.

and says she—ha! ha!—says she, '*Od, ye're a lang lad: God gie ye grace.*' Dry—very dry—wasn't it? There was real humour in that—a pawky humour that people in the South cannot understand at all. '*Od,*' says she, '*ye're a lang lad: God grant ye grace.*' There was a great dale of character in that."

We were sure of it; but still we preferred the Laird's stories about Homesh. We invariably liked best the stories at which the Laird laughed most—whether we quite understood their pawky humour or not.

"Dr. Sutherland has a great many stories about the Highlanders," says Miss Avon timidly; "they are very amusing."

"As far as I have observed," remarked the Laird—for how could he relish the notion of having a rival anecdote-monger on board?—"as far as I have observed, the Highland character is entirely without humour. Ay, I have heard Tom Galbraith say that very often, and he has been everywhere in the Highlands."

"Well, then," says Mary Avon, with a quick warmth of indignation in her face—how rapidly those soft dark eyes could change their expression!—"I hope Mr. Galbraith knows more about painting than he knows about the Highlanders! I thought that anybody who knows anything knows that the Celtic nature is full of imagination, and humour, and pathos, and poetry; and the Saxon—the Saxon!—it is his business to plod over ploughed fields, and be as dull and commonplace as the other animals he sees there!"

Gracious goodness!—here was a tempest! The Laird was speechless; for, indeed, at this moment we bumped against the sacred shores—that is to say, the landing-slip—of Iona; and had to scramble on to the big stones. Then we walked up and past the cottages, and through the potato-field, and past the white inn, and so to the hallowed shrine and its graves of

the kings. We spent the whole of the afternoon there.

When we got back to the yacht and to dinner we discovered that a friend had visited us in our absence, and had left of his largesse behind him—nasturtiums and yellow-and-white pansies, and what not—to say nothing of fresh milk, and crisp, delightful lettuce. We drank his health.

Was it the fear of some one breaking in on our domestic peace that made that last evening among the western islands so lovely to us? We went out in the gig after dinner; the Laird put forth his engines of destruction to encompass the innocent lythe; we heard him humming the "Haughs o' Cromdale" in the silence. The wonderful glory of that evening!—Iona become an intense olive-green against the gold and crimson of the sunset; the warm light shining along the red granite of western Mull. Then the yellow moon rose in the south—into the calm violet-hued vault of the heavens; and there was a golden fire on the ripples and on the wet blades of the oars as we rowed back with laughter and singing.

Sing tántara! sing tántara!
Sing tántara! sing tántara!
Said he, the Highland army rues
That ere they came to Cromdale!

And then, next morning, we were up at five o'clock. If we were going to have a tooth pulled, why not have the little interview over at once? East Wind would be waiting for us at Castle Osprey.

Blow, soft westerly breeze, then, and bear us down by Fion-phort, and round the granite Ross—shining all a pale red in the early dawn. And here is Ardalanish Point; and there, as the morning goes by, are the Carsaig arches, and then Loch Buy, and finally the blue Firth of Lorn. Northward now, and still northward—until, far away, the white house shining

amidst the firs, and the flag fluttering in the summer air. Have they descried us, then? Or is the bunting hoisted in honour of guests? The pale cheek of Mary Avon tells a tale as she descries that far signal; but that is no business of ours. Perhaps it is only of her uncle that she is thinking.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR NEW GUESTS.

Behold, now!—this beautiful garden of Castle Osprey all ablaze in the sun—the roses, pansies, poppies, and what not bewildering our eyes after the long looking at the blue water; and, in the midst of the brilliant paradise—just as we had feared—the snake! He did not scurry away at our approach, as snakes are wont to do; or raise his horrent head, and hiss. The fact is, we found him comfortably seated under a drooping ash, smoking. He rose and explained that he had strolled up from the shore to await our coming. He did not seem to notice that Mary Avon, as she came along, had to walk slowly, and was leaning on the arm of the Laird.

Certainly nature had not been bountiful to this short, spare person who had now come among us. He had closely-cropped, coarse grey hair; an eagle beak; a certain pink and raw appearance of the face, as if perpetual east winds had chafed the skin; and a most pernicious habit of loudly clearing his husky throat. Then with the aggressive nose went a well-defined pugilist's jaw and a general hang-dog scowl about the mouth. For the rest Mr. Smethurst seemed desirous of making up for those unpleasant features which nature had bestowed upon him by a studied air of

self-possession, and by an extreme precision of dress. Alack, and well-a-day! these laudable efforts were of little avail. Nature was too strong for him. The assumption of a languid air was not quite in consonance with the ferrety grey eyes and the bull-dog mouth; the precision of his costume only gave him the look of a well-dressed groom, or a butler gone on the turf. There was not much grateful to the sight about Mr. Frederick Smethurst.

But were we to hate the man for being ugly? Despite his raw face, he might have the white soul of an angel. And in fact we knew absolutely nothing against his public character or private reputation, except that he had once gone through the Bankruptcy Court; and even of that little circumstance our women-folk were not aware. However, there was no doubt at all that a certain coldness—apparent to us who knew her well—marked the manner of this small lady who now went up and shook hands with him, and declared—unblushingly—that she was so glad he had run up to the Highlands.

"And you know," said she, with that charming politeness which she would show to the arch-fiend himself if he were properly introduced to her, "you know, Mr. Smethurst, that yachting is such an uncertain thing, one never knows when one may get back; but if you could spare a few days to take a run with us, you would see what a capital mariner Mary has become, and I am sure it would be a great pleasure to us."

These were actually her words. She uttered them without the least tremor of hesitation. She looked him straight in the face with those clear, innocent, confiding eyes of hers. How could the man tell that she was wishing him at Jericho?

And it was in silence that we waited to hear our doom pronounced. A yachting trip with this intolerable Jonah on board! The sunlight went out of the

day; the blue went out of the sky and the seas; the world was filled with gloom, and chaos, and East Wind!

Imagine, then, the sudden joy with which we heard of our deliverance! Surely it was not the raucous voice of Frederick Smethurst, but a sound of summer bells.

"Oh, thank you," he said, in his affectedly indifferent way; "but the fact is, I have run up to see Mary only on a little matter of business, and I must get back at once. Indeed, I purpose leaving by the Dalmally coach in the afternoon. Thank you very much, though; perhaps some other time I may be more fortunate."

How we had wronged this poor man! We hated him no longer. On the contrary, great grief was expressed over his departure; and he was begged at least to stay that one evening. No doubt he had heard of Dr. Angus Sutherland, who had made such discoveries in the use of anæsthetics? Dr. Sutherland was coming by the afternoon steamer. Would not he stay and meet him at dinner?

Our tears broke out afresh—metaphorically—when East Wind persisted in his intention of departure; but of course compulsion was out of the question. And so we allowed him to go into the house, to have that business interview with his niece.

"A poor crayture!" remarked the Laird confidently, forgetting that he was talking of a friend of ours. "Why does he not speak out like a man, instead of drawling and dawdling? His accent is jist insufferable."

"And what business can he have with Mary?" says our sovereign lady sharply—just as if a man with a raw skin and an eagle-beak must necessarily be a pickpocket. "He was the trustee of that little fortune of hers, I know; but that is all over. She got the money when she came of age. What can he want to see her about now?"

We concerned ourselves not with that. It was

enough for us that the snake was about to retreat from our summer paradise of his own free will and pleasure. And Angus Sutherland was coming; and the provisioning of the yacht had to be seen to; for to-morrow—to-morrow we spread our white wings again and take flight to the far north!

Never was parting guest so warmly speeded. We concealed our tears as the coach rolled away. We waved a hand to him. And then, when it was suggested that the waggonette that had brought Mary Avon down from Castle Osprey might just as well go along to the quay—for the steamer bringing Dr. Sutherland would be in shortly—and when we actually did set out in that direction, there was so little grief on our faces that you could not have told we had been bidding farewell to a valued friend and relative.

Now if our good-hearted Laird had had a grain of jealousy in his nature, he might well have resented the manner in which these two women spoke of the approaching guest. In their talk the word "he" meant only one person. "He" was sure to come by this steamer. "He" was so punctual in his engagements. Would he bring a gun or a rod; or would the sailing be enough amusement for him? What a capital thing it was for him to be able to take an interest in some such out-of-door exercise, as a distraction to the mind! And so forth, and so forth. The Laird heard all this, and his expectations were no doubt rising and rising. Forgetful of his disappointment on first seeing Mary Avon, he was in all likelihood creating an imaginary figure of Angus Sutherland—and, of course, this marvel of erudition and intellectual power must be a tall, wan, pale person, with the travail of thinking written in lines across the spacious brow. The Laird was not aware that for many a day after we first made the acquaintance of the young Scotch student he was generally referred to in our private conversation as "Brose."

And, indeed, the Laird did stare considerably when he saw—elbowing his way through the crowd and making for us with a laugh of welcome on the fresh-coloured face—a stout-set, muscular, blue-eyed, sandy-haired, good-humoured-looking, youngish man; who, instead of having anything Celtic about his appearance, might have been taken for the son of a south-country farmer. Our young Doctor was carrying his own portmanteau, and sturdily shoving his way through the porters who would fain have seized it.

"I am glad to see you, Angus," said our queen regent, holding out her hand; and there was no ceremonial politeness in that reception—but you should have seen the look in her eyes.

Then he went on to the waggonette.

"How do you do, Miss Avon?" said he, quite timidly, like a school-boy. He scarcely glanced up at her face, which was regarding him with a very pleasant welcome; he seemed relieved when he had to turn and seize his portmanteau again. Knowing that he was rather fond of driving, our mistress and admiral-in-chief offered him the reins, but he declined the honour; Mary Avon was sitting in front. "Oh, no, thank you," said he quite hastily, and with something uncommonly like a blush. The Laird, if he had been entertaining any feeling of jealousy, must have been reassured. This Doctor-fellow was no formidable rival. He spoke very little—he only listened—as we drove away to Castle Osprey. Mary Avon was chatting briskly and cheerfully, and it was to the Laird that she addressed that running fire of nonsense and merry laughter.

But the young Doctor was greatly concerned when, on our arrival at Castle Osprey, he saw Mary Avon helped down with much care, and heard the story of the sprain.

"Who bandages your ankle?" said he at once, and without any shyness now.

"I do it myself," said she cheerfully. "I can do it well enough."

"Oh, no, you cannot!" said he abruptly; "a person stooping cannot. The bandage should be as tight, and as smooth, as the skin of a drum. You must let some one else do that for you."

And he was disposed to resent this walking about in the garden before dinner. What business had she to trifle with such a serious matter as a sprain? And a sprain which was the recall of an older sprain. "Did she wish to be lame for life?" he asked sharply.

Mary Avon laughed, and said that worse things than that had befallen people. He asked her whether she found any pleasure in voluntary martyrdom; she blushed a little, and turned to the Laird.

The Laird was at this moment laying before us the details of a most gigantic scheme. It appeared that the inhabitants of Strathgoven, not content with a steam fire-engine, were talking about having a public park—actually proposing to have a public park, with beds of flowers, and iron seats; and, to crown all, a gymnasium, where the youths of the neighbourhood might twirl themselves on the gay trapèze to their hearts' content. And where the subscriptions were to come from; and what were the hardiest plants for borders; and whether the gymnasium should be furnished with ropes or with chains—these matters were weighing heavily on the mind of our good friend of Denny-mains. Angus Sutherland relapsed into silence, and gazed absently at a tree-fuchsia that stood by.

"It is a beautiful tree, is it not?" said a voice beside him—that of our midge-like empress.

He started.

"Oh, yes," he said cheerfully. "I was thinking I should like to live the life of a tree like that, dying in the winter, you know, and being quite impervious to frost, and snow, and hard weather; and then, as soon as the fine warm spring and summer came round,

coming to life again and spreading yourself out to feel all the sunlight and the warm winds. That must be a capital life."

"But do you really think they can feel that? Why, you must believe that those trees and flowers are alive!"

"Does anybody doubt it?" said he quite simply. "They are certainly alive. Why——"

And here he bethought himself for a moment.

"If I only had a good microscope now," said he eagerly, "I would show you the life of a plant directly—in every cell of it: did you never see the constant life in each cell—the motion of the clorophyll granules circling and circling night and day? Did no one ever show you that?"

Well, no one had ever shown us that. We may now and again have entertained angels unawares; but we were not always stumbling against Fellows of the Royal Society.

"Then I must borrow one somewhere," said he decisively, "and show you the secret life of even the humblest plant that exists. And then look what a long life it is, in the case of the perennial plants. Did you ever think of that? Those great trees in the Yosemite valley—they were alive and feeling the warm sunlight and the winds about them when Alfred was hiding in the marshes; and they were living the same undisturbed life when Charles the First had his head chopped off; and they were living—in peace and quietness—when all Europe had to wake up to stamp out the Napoleonic pest; and they are alive now and quite careless of the little creatures that come to span out their circumference, and ticket them, and give them ridiculous names. Had any of the patriarchs a life as long as that?"

The Laird eyed this young man askance. There was something uncanny about him. What might not he say when—in the northern solitudes to which we

were going—the great Semple heresy-case was brought on for discussion?

But at dinner the Laird got on very well with our new guest; for the latter listened most respectfully when Denny-mains was demonstrating the exceeding purity, and strength, and fitness of the speech used in the south of Scotland. And indeed the Laird was generous. He admitted that there were blemishes. He deprecated the introduction of French words; and gave us a much longer list of those aliens than usually appears in books. What about *conjee*, and *que-vee*, and *fracaw* as used by Scotch children and old wives?

Then after dinner—at nine o'clock the wonderful glow of the summer evening was still filling the drawing-room—the Laird must needs have Mary Avon sing to him. It was not a custom of hers. She rarely would sing a song of set purpose. The linnet sings all day—when you do not watch her; but she will not sing if you go and ask.

However, on this occasion, her hostess went to the piano, and sat down to play the accompaniment; and Mary Avon stood beside her, and sang, in rather a low voice—but it was tender enough—some modern version of the old ballad of the Queen's Maries. What were the words? These were of them, any way:—

Yestreen the Queen had four Maries;
This night she'll hae but three:
There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me.

But indeed, if you had seen that graceful slim figure—clad all in black velvet, with the broad band of gold fringe round the neck—and the small, shapely, smoothly-brushed head above the soft swathes of white muslin—and if you had caught a glimpse of the black eyelashes drooping outward from the curve of the pale cheek—and if you had heard the tender, low

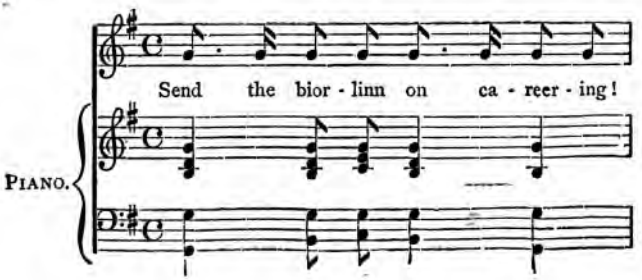
voice of Mary Avon, you might have forgotten about the Queen's Maries altogether.

And then Dr. Sutherland: the Laird was determined —in true Scotch fashion—that everybody who could not sing should be goaded to sing.

"Oh, well," said the young man, with a laugh, "you know a student in Germany must sing whether he can or not. And I learned there to smash out something like an accompaniment also."

And he went to the piano without more ado and did smash out an accompaniment. And if his voice was rather harsh?—well, we should have called it raucous in the case of East Wind, but we only called it manly and strenuous when it was Angus Sutherland who sang. And it was a manly song, too—a fitting song for our last night on shore, the words hailing from the green woods of Fuinary, the air an air that had many a time been heard among the western seas. It was the song of the Biorlinn * that he sang to us; we could hear the brave chorus and the splash of the long oars:—

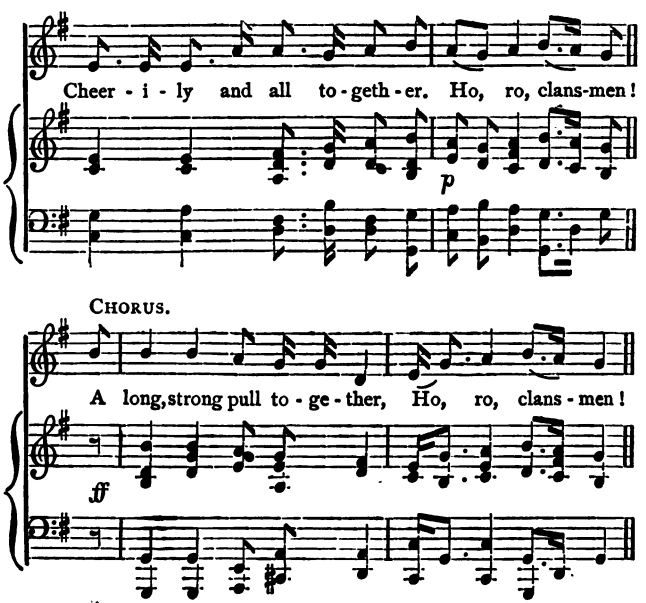
* *Biorlinn*—that is, a rowing-boat. The word is pronounced *byurien*. The song, which in a measure imitates the rhythm peculiar to Highland poetry—consisting in a certain repetition of the same vowel sounds—is the production of Dr. Macleod, of Morven. And here, for the benefit of any one who minds such things, is a rough draft of the air, arranged by a most charming young lady, who, however, says she would much rather die than have her name mentioned:—



Send the biorlinn on careering!
Cheerily and all together—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Give her way and show her wake
'Mid showering spray and curling eddies—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Do we not hear now the measured stroke in the darkness of the morning? The water springs from her bows; one by one the headlands are passed. But lo! the day is breaking; the dawn will surely bring a breeze with it; and then the sail of the gallant craft will bear her over the seas:—



Another cheer, our Isle appears!
Our biorlinn bears her on the faster—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Ahead she goes! the land she knows!
Behold! the snowy shores of Canna—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

A long strong pull together indeed: who could resist joining in the thunder of the chorus? And we were bound for Canna, too: this was our last night on shore.

Our last night on shore. In such circumstances one naturally has a glance round at the people with whom one is to be brought into such close contact for many and many a day. But in this particular case, what was the use of speculating, or grumbling, or remonstrating? There is a certain household that is ruled with a rod of iron. And if the mistress of that household chose to select as her summer companions a "shilpit bit thing," and a hard-headed, ambitious Scotch student, and a parochial magnate haunted by a heresy-case, how dared one object? There is such a thing as peace and quietness.

But however unpromising the outlook might be, do we not know the remark that is usually made by that hard-worked officer, the chief mate, when, on the eve of a voyage, he finds himself confronted by an unusually mongrel crew? He regards those loafers and outcasts—from the Bowery, and Ratcliffe Highway, and the Broomielaw—Greeks, niggers, and Mexicans—with a critical and perhaps scornful air, and forthwith proceeds to address them in the following highly polished manner:—

"By etcetera-etcetera, you are an etceteraed rum-looking lot; but etcetera-etcetera me *if I don't lick you into shape before we get to Rio.*"

And so—good-night!—and let all good people pray for fair skies and a favouring breeze! And if there is any song to be heard in our dreams, let it be the song of the Queen's Maries—in the low, tender voice of Mary Avon:—

There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me.

CHAPTER VII.

NORTHWARD.

We have bidden good-bye to the land; the woods and the green hills have become pale in the haze of the summer light; we are out here, alone, on the shining blue plain. And if our young Doctor betrays a tendency to keep forward—conversing with John of Skye about blocks, and tackle, and winches; and if the Laird—whose parental care and regard for Mary Avon is becoming beautiful to see—should have quite a monopoly of the young lady, and be more bent than ever on amusing her with his "good ones;" and if our queen and governor should spend a large portion of her time below, in decorating cabins with flowers, in overhauling napery, and in earnest consultation with Master Fred about certain culinary mysteries; notwithstanding all these divergences of place and occupation, our little kingdom afloat is compact enough. There is always, for example, a reassembling at meals. There is an instant community of interest when a sudden cry calls all hands on deck to regard some new thing—the spouting of a whale or the silvery splashing of a shoal of mackerel. But now—but now—if only some cloud-compelling Jove would break this insufferably fine weather, and give us a tearing good gale!

It is a strange little kingdom. It has no postal service. Shilling telegrams are unknown in it; there is no newspaper at breakfast. There are no barrel-organs; nor rattling hansoms raising the dust in windy streets; there is no afternoon scandal; over-heated rooms at midnight are a thing of the past. Serene, independent, self-centred, it minds its own affairs; if the whole of Europe were roaring for war, not even an echo of the cry would reach us. We only hear the soft calling of the sea-birds as we sit and read, or talk, or smoke; from time to time watching the shadows move on the blistering hot decks, or guessing at the names of the blue mountains that rise above Loch Etive and Lochaber. At the present moment there is a faint summer haze over these mountains; as yet we have around us none of the dazzling light and strangely intense colours that are peculiar to this part of the world, and that are only possible, in fact, in an atmosphere frequently washed clear by squalls of rain. This question of rain turns up at lunch.

"They prayed for rain in the churches last Sunday —so Captain John says," Mary Avon remarks.

"The distilleries are stopped: that's very serious," continues the Laird.

"Well," says Queen T., "people talk about the rain in the West Highlands. It must be true, as everybody says it is true. But now—excepting the year we went to America with Sylvia Balfour—we have been here for five years running; and each year we made up our minds for a deluge—thinking we had deserved it, you know. Well, it never came. Look at this now."

And the fact was that we were lying motionless on the smooth bosom of the Atlantic, with the sun so hot on the decks that we were glad to get below.

"Very strange—very strange, indeed," remarked the Laird, with a profound air. "Now what value are we to put on any historical evidence if we find such a

conflict of testimony about what is at our own doors? How should there be two opeenions about the weather in the West Highlands? It is a matter of common experience—dear me! I never heard the like."

"Oh, but I think we might try to reconcile those diverse opinions!" said Angus Sutherland, with an absolute gravity. "You hear mostly the complaints of London people, who make much of a passing shower. Then the tourist and holiday folk, especially from the South, come in the autumn, when the fine summer weather has broken. And then," he added, addressing himself with a frank smile to the small creature who had been expressing her wonder over the fine weather, "perhaps, if you are pleased with your holiday on the whole, you are not anxious to remember the wet days; and then you are not afraid of a shower, I know; and besides that, when one is yachting, one is more anxious for wind than for fine weather."

"Oh, I am sure that is it!" called out Mary Avon quite eagerly. She did not care how she destroyed the Laird's convictions about the value of historical evidence. "That is an explanation of the whole thing."

At this, our young Doctor—who had been professing to treat this matter seriously merely as a joke—quickly lowered his eyes. He scarcely ever looked Mary Avon in the face when she spoke to him, or when he had to speak to her. And a little bit of shy embarrassment in his manner towards her—perceivable only at times—was all the more singular in a man who was shrewd and hard-headed enough, who had knocked about the world and seen many persons and things, and who had a fair amount of unassuming self-confidence, mingled with a vein of sly and reticent humour. He talked freely enough when he was addressing our admiral-in-chief. He was not afraid to meet *her* eyes. Indeed, they were so familiar friends that she called him by his Christian name—a practice which in general

she detested. But she would as soon have thought of applying "Mr." to one of her own boys at Epsom College as to Angus Sutherland.

"Well, you know, Angus," says she pleasantly, "you have definitely promised to go up to the Outer Hebrides with us, and back. The longer the calms last, the longer we shall have you. So we shall gladly put up with the fine weather."

"It is very kind of you to say so; but I have already had such a long holiday——"

"Oh!" said Mary Avon, with her eyes full of wonder and indignation. She was too surprised to say any more. She only stared at him. She knew he had been working night and day in Edinburgh.

"I mean," said he hastily, and looking down, "I have been away so long from London. Indeed, I was getting rather anxious about my next month's number; but luckily, just before I left Edinburgh, a kind friend sent me a most valuable paper, so I am quite at ease again. Would you like to read it, sir? It is set up in type."

He took the sheets from his pocket, and handed them to the Laird. Denny-mains looked at the title. It was *On the Radiolarians of the Coal Measures,* and it was the production of a well-known professor. The Laird handed back the paper without opening it.

"No thank you," said he, with some dignity. "If I wish to be instructed, I would like a safer guide than that man."

We looked with dismay on this dangerous thing that had been brought on board: might it not explode and blow up the ship?

"Why," said our Doctor, in unaffected wonder, and entirely mistaking the Laird's exclamation, "he is a perfect master of his subject."

"There is a great deal too much speculation nowadays on these matters, and parteeculary among the younger men," remarked the Laird severely. And he

looked at Angus Sutherland. "I suppose now ye are well acquainted with the *Vestiges of Creation?*"

"I have heard of the book," said Brose—regretfully confessing his ignorance, "but I never happened to see it."

The Laird's countenance lightened.

"So much the better—so much the better. A most mischievous and unsettling book. But all the harm it can do is counteracted by a noble work—a conclusive work that leaves nothing to be said. Ye have read the *Testimony of the Rocks,* no doubt?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," our Doctor was glad to be able to say: "but—but it was a long time ago—when I was a boy, in fact."

"Boy, or man, you'll get no better book on the history of the earth. I tell ye, sir, I never read a book that placed such firm conviction in my mind. Will ye get any of the new men they are talking about as keen an observer and as skilful in arguing as Hugh Miller? No, no; not one of them dares to try to upset the *Testimony of the Rocks.*"

Angus Sutherland appealed against this sentence of finality only in a very humble way.

"Of course, sir," said he meekly, "you know that science is still moving forward——"

"Science?" repeated the Laird. "Science may be moving forward or moving backward; but can it upset the facts of the earth? Science may say what it likes; but the facts remain the same."

Now this point was so conclusive that we unanimously hailed the Laird as victor. Our young Doctor submitted with an excellent good humour. He even promised to post that paper on the Radiolarians at the very first post-office we might reach: we did not want any such explosive compounds on board.

That night we only got as far as Fishnish Bay—a solitary little harbour probably down on but few maps; and that we had to reach by getting out the

gig for a tow. There was a strange bronze-red in the northern skies, long after the sun had set; but in here the shadow of the great mountains was on the water. We could scarcely see the gig; but Angus Sutherland had joined the men and was pulling stroke; and along with the measured splash of the oars, we heard something about "*Ho, ro, clansmen!*" Then, in the cool night air, there was a slight fragrance of peat-smoke; we knew we were getting near the shore.

"He's a fine fellow, that," says the Laird, generously, of his defeated antagonist. "A fine fellow. His knowledge of different things is just remarkable; and he's as modest as a girl. Ay, and he can row, too; a while ago, when it was lighter, I could see him put his shoulders into it. Ay, he's a fine, good-natured fellow, and I am glad he has not been led astray by that mischievous book, the *Vestiges of Creation*."

Come on board now, boys, and swing up the gig to the davits! Twelve fathoms of chain?—away with her then!—and there is a roar in the silence of the lonely little bay. And thereafter silence; and the sweet fragrance of the peat in the night air, and the appearance, above the black hills, of a clear, shining, golden planet that sends a quivering line of light across the water to us. And, once more, good-night and pleasant dreams!

But what is this in the morning? There have been no pleasant dreams for John of Skye and his merry men during the last night; for here we are already between Mingary Bay and Ru-na-Gaul Lighthouse; and before us is the open Atlantic, blue under the fair skies of the morning. And here is Dr. Sutherland, at the tiller, with a suspiciously negligent look about his hair and shirt-collar.

"I have been up since four," says he, with a laugh. "I heard them getting under way, and did not wish to miss anything. You know these places are not so familiar to me as they are to you."

"Is there going to be any wind to-day, John?"

"No mich," says John of Skye, looking at the cloudless blue vault above the glassy sweeps of the sea.

Nevertheless, as the morning goes by, we get as much of a breeze as enables us to draw away from the mainland—round Ardnamurchan ("the headland of the great sea") and out into the open—with Muick Island, and the sharp Scuir of Eigg, and the peaks of Rum lying over there on the still Atlantic, and far away in the north the vast and spectral mountains of Skye.

And now the work of the day begins. Mary Avon, for mere shame's sake, is at last compelled to produce one of her blank canvases and open her box of tubes. And now it would appear that Angus Sutherland—though deprived of the authority of the sick-room—is beginning to lose his fear of the English young lady. He makes himself useful—not with the elaborate and patronising courtesy of the Laird, but in a sort of submissive, matter-of-fact shifty fashion. He sheathes the spikes of her easel with cork so that they shall not mark the deck. He rigs up, to counterbalance that lack of stability, a piece of cord with a heavy weight. Then, with the easel fixed, he fetches her a deck-chair to sit in, and a deck-stool for her colours, and these and her he places under the lee of the foresail, to be out of the glare of the sun. Thus our artist is started; she is going to make a sketch of the after-part of the yacht with Hector of Moidart at the tiller: beyond, the calm blue seas, and a faint promontory of land.

Then the Laird—having confidentially remarked to Miss Avon that Tom Galbraith, than whom there is no greater authority living, invariably moistens the fresh canvas with megilp before beginning work—has turned to the last report of the Semple case.

"No, no," says he to our sovereign lady, who is engaged in some mysterious work in wool, "it does not look well for the Presbytery to go over every one

of the charges in the major proposeetion—supported by the averments in the minor—only to find them irrelevant; and then bring home to him the part of the libel that deals with tendency. No, no; that shows a lamentable want of purpose. In view of the great danger to be apprehended from these secret assaults on the inspiration of the Scriptures, they should have stuck to each charge with tenacity. Now, I will just show ye where Dr. Carnegie, in defending *Secundo* —illustrated as it was with the extracts and averments in the minor—let the whole thing slip through his fingers."

But if any one were disposed to be absolutely idle on this calm, shining, beautiful day—far away from the cares and labours of the land? Out on the taffrail, under shadow of the mizen, there is a seat that is gratefully cool. The glare of the sea no longer bewilders the eyes; one can watch with a lazy enjoyment the teeming life of the open Atlantic. The great skarts go whizzing by, long-necked, rapid of flight. The gannets poise in the air, and then there is a sudden dart downwards, and a spout of water flashes up where the bird has dived. The guillemots fill the silence with their soft kurrooing—and here they are on all sides of us—*Kurroo! Kurroo!*—dipping their bills in the water, hastening away from the vessel, and then rising on the surface to flap their wings. But this is a strange thing: they are all in pairs—obviously mother and child—and the mother calls *Kurroo! Kurroo!*—and the young one, unable as yet to dive or swim, answers *Pe-yoo-it! Pe-yoo-it!* and flutters and paddles after her. But where is the father? And has the guillemot only one of a family? Over that one, at all events, she exercises a valiant protection. Even though the stem of the yacht seems likely to run both of them down, she will neither dive nor fly until she has piloted the young one out of danger.

Then a sudden cry startles the Laird from his

heresy-case and Mary Avon from her canvas. A sound far away has turned all eyes to the north; though there is nothing visible there, over the shining calm of the sea, but a small cloud of white spray that slowly sinks. In a second or two, however, we see another jet of white water arise; and then a great brown mass heave slowly over; and then we hear the spouting of the whale.

"What a huge animal!" cries one. "A hundred feet!"

"Eighty, any way!"

The whale is sheering off to the north: there is less and less chance of our forming any correct estimate.

"Oh, I am sure it was a hundred! Don't you think so, Angus?" says our admiral.

"Well," says the Doctor, slowly—pretending to be very anxious about keeping the sails full (when there was no wind)—"you know there is a great difference between 'yacht measurement' and 'registered tonnage.' A vessel of fifty registered tons may become eighty or ninety by yacht measurement. And I have often noticed," continues this graceless young man, who takes no thought how he is bringing contempt on his elders, "that objects seen from the deck of a yacht are naturally subject to 'yacht measurement.' I don't know what the size of that whale may be. Its registered tonnage, I suppose, would be the number of Jonahs it could carry. But I should think that if the apparent 'yacht measurement' was a hundred feet, the whale was probably about twenty feet long."

It was thus he tried to diminish the marvels of the deep! But, however he might crush us otherwise, we were his masters on one point. The Semple heresy-case was too deep even for him. What could he make of "*the first alternative of the general major*"?

And see now, on this calm summer evening, we pass between Muick and Eigg; and the sea is like a plain of gold. As we draw near the sombre mass of Rum,

the sunset deepens, and a strange lurid mist hangs around this remote and mountainous island rising sheer from the Atlantic. Gloomy and mysterious are the vast peaks of Haleval and Haskeval; we creep under them—favoured by a flood-tide—and the silence of the desolate shores seems to spread out from them and to encompass us.

Mary Avon has long ago put away her canvas; she sits and watches; and her soft black eyes are full of dreaming as she gazes up at those thunder-dark mountains against the rosy haze of the west.

"Haleval and Haskeval?" Angus Sutherland repeats, in reply to his hostess; but he starts all the same, for he has been covertly regarding the dark and wistful eyes of the girl sitting there. "Oh, these are Norse names. Scuir na Gillean, on the other hand, is Gaelic—it is *the peak of the young men.* Perhaps, the Norsemen had the north of the island, and the Celts the south."

Whether they were named by Scandinavian or by Celt, Haleval and Haskeval seemed to overshadow us with their sultry gloom as we slowly glided into the lonely loch lying at their base. We were the only vessel there; and we could make out no sign of life on shore, until the glass revealed to us one or two half-ruined cottages. The northern twilight shone in the sky far into the night; but neither that clear metallic glow, nor any radiance from moon, or planet, or star, seemed to affect the thunder-darkness of Haskeval and Haleval's silent peaks.

There was another tale to tell below—the big saloon aglow with candles; the white table-cover with its centre-piece of roses, nasturtiums, and ferns; the delayed dinner, or supper, or whatever it might be called, all artistically arranged; our young Doctor most humbly solicitous that Mary Avon should be comfortably seated, and, in fact, quite usurping the office of the Laird in that respect; and then a sudden

sound in the galley, a hissing as of a thousand squibs, telling us that Master Fred had once more and ineffectually tried to suppress the released genie of the bottle by jamming down the cork. Forthwith the Laird, with his old-fashioned ways, must needs propose a health, which is that of our most sovereign and midge-like mistress; and this he does with an elaborate and gracious and sonorous courtesy. And surely there is no reason why Mary Avon should not for once break her habit and join in that simple ceremony; especially when it is a real live Doctor—and not only a Doctor, but an encyclopædia of scientific and all other knowledge—who would fain fill her glass? Angus Sutherland timidly but seriously pleads; and he does not plead in vain; and you would think from his look that she had conferred an extraordinary favour on him. Then we—we propose a health too—the health of the FOUR WINDS! and we do not care which of them it is who is coming to-morrow, so long as he or she comes in force. Blow, breezes blow!—from the Coolins of Skye, or the shores of Coll, or the glens of Arisaig and Moidart—for to-morrow morning we shake out once more the white wings of the *White Dove*, and set forth for the loneliness of the northern seas.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLOTS AND COUNTER-PLOTS.

Now the Laird has a habit—laudable or not—o lingering over an additional half-cup at breakfast, as an excuse for desultory talk; and thus it is, on this particular morning, the young people having gone on deck to see the yacht get under way, that Denny-mains has a chance of revealing to us certain secret schemes

of his over which he has apparently been brooding. How could we have imagined that all this plotting and planning had been going on beneath the sedate exterior of the Commissioner for the Burgh of Strathgovan?

"She's just a wonderful bit lass!" he says, confidently, to his hostess; "as happy and contented as the day is long; and when she's not singing to herself, her way of speech has a sort of—a sort of music in it that is quite new to me. Yes, I must admit that; I did not know that the southern English tongue was so accurate and pleasant to the ear. Ay, but what will become of her?"

What, indeed! The lady whom he was addressing had often spoken to him of Mary Avon's isolated position in the world.

"It fairly distresses me," continues the good-hearted Laird, "when I think of her condeetion—not at present, when she has, if I may be allowed to say so, *several* friends near her who would be glad to do what they could for her; but by and by, when she is becoming older——"

The Laird hesitated. Was it possible, after all, that he was about to hint at the chance of Mary Avon becoming the mistress of the mansion and estate of Denny-mains? Then he made a plunge.

"A young woman in her position should have a husband to protect her, that is what I am sure of. Have ye never thought of it, ma'am?"

"I should like very well to see Mary married," says the other, demurely. "And I know she would make an excellent wife."

"An excellent wife!" exclaims the Laird; and then he adds, with a tone approaching to severity, "I tell ye he will be a fortunate man that gets her. Oh, ay; I have watched her. I can keep my eyes open when there is need. Did you hear her asking the captain about his wife and children? I tell you there's *human nature* in that lass."

There was no need for the Laird to be so pugnacious; we were not contesting the point. However, he resumed—

"I have been thinking," said he, with a little more shyness, "about my nephew. He's a good lad. Well, ye know, ma'am, that I do not approve of young men being brought up in idleness, whatever their prospects must be; and I have no doubt whatever that my nephew Howard is working hard enough—what with the reading of law-books, and attending the courts, and all that—though as yet he has not had much business. But then there is no necessity. I do not think he is a lad of any great ambeetion, like your friend Mr. Sutherland, who has to fight his way in the world in any case. But Howard—I have been thinking now that if he was to get married and settled, he might give up the law business altogether; and, if they were content to live in Scotland, he might look after Denny-mains. It will be his in any case, ye know; he would have the interest of a man looking after his own property. Now, I will tell ye plainly, ma'am, what I have been thinking about this day or two back; if Howard would marry your young lady friend, that would be agreeable to me."

The calm manner in which the Laird announced his scheme showed that it had been well matured. It was a natural, simple, feasible arrangement, by which two persons in whom he took a warm interest would be benefited at once.

"But then, sir," said his hostess, with a smile which she could not wholly repress, "you know people never do marry to please a third person—at least, very seldom."

"Oh, there can be no forcing," said the Laird with decision. "But I have done a great deal for Howard; may I not expect that he will do something for me?"

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless," says this amiable lady, who has had some experience in match-making her-

self; "but I have generally found that marriages that would be in every way suitable and pleasing to friends, and obviously desirable, are precisely the marriages that never come off. Young people, when they are flung at each other's heads, to use the common phrase, never will be sensible and please their relatives. Now if you were to bring your nephew here, do you think Mary would fall in love with him because she ought? More likely you would find that, out of pure contrariety, she would fall in love with Angus Sutherland, who cannot afford to marry, and whose head is filled with other things."

"I am not sure, I am not sure," said the Laird, musingly. "Howard is a good-looking young fellow, and a capital lad, too. I am not so sure."

"And then, you know," said the other shyly, for she will not plainly say anything to Mary's disparagement, "young men have different tastes in their choice of a wife. He might not have the high opinion of her that you have."

At this the Laird gave a look of surprise—even of resentment.

"Then I'll tell ye what it is, ma'am," said he, almost angrily; "if my nephew had the chance of marrying such a girl, and did not do so, I should consider him —I should consider him *a fool*, and say so."

And then he added, sharply—

"And do ye think I would let Denny-mains pass into the hands of *a fool?*"

Now this kind lady had had no intention of rousing the wrath of the Laird in this manner; and she instantly set about pacifying him. And the Laird was easily pacified. In a minute or two he was laughing good-naturedly at himself for getting into a passion; he said it would not do for one at his time of life to try to play the part of the stern father as they played that in theatre pieces—there was to be no forcing.

"But he's a good lad, ma'am, a good lad," said he, rising as his hostess rose; and he added, significantly, "he is no fool, I assure ye, ma'am; he has plenty of common sense."

When we get up on deck again, we find that the *White Dove* is gently gliding out of the lonely Loch Scresorst, with its solitary house among the trees, and its crofters' huts at the base of the sombre hills. And as the light cool breeze—gratefully cool after the blazing heat of the last day or two—carries us away northward, we see more and more of the awful solitudes of Haleval and Haskeval, that are still thunderous and dark under the hazy sky. Above the great shoulders, and under the purple peaks, we see the far-reaching corries opening up, with here and there a white water-fall just visible in the hollows. There is a sense of escape as we draw away from that over-shadowing gloom.

Then we discover that we have a new skipper to-day, *vice* John of Skye, deposed. The fresh hand is Mary Avon, who is at the tiller, and looking exceedingly business-like. She has been promoted to this post by Dr. Sutherland, who stands by; she receives explanations about the procedure of Hector of Moidart, who is up aloft, lacing the smaller topsail to the mast; she watches the operations of John of Skye and Sandy, who are at the sheets below; and, like a wise and considerate captain, she pretends not to notice Master Fred, who is having a quiet smoke by the windlass. And so, past those lonely shores sails the brave vessel —the yawl *White Dove*, Captain Mary Avon, bound for anywhere.

But you must not imagine that the new skipper is allowed to stand by the tiller. Captain though she may be, she has to submit civilly to dictation, in so far as her foot is concerned. Our young Doctor has compelled her to be seated, and he has passed a rope round the tiller that so she can steer from her chair,

and from time to time he gives suggestions, which she receives as orders.

"I wish I had been with you when you first sprained your foot," he says.

"Yes?" she answers, with humble inquiry in her eyes.

"I would have put it in plaster of Paris," he says, in a matter-of-fact way, "and locked you up in the house for a fortnight; at the end of that time you would not know which ankle was the sprained one."

There was neither "with your leave" nor "by your leave" in this young man's manner when he spoke of that accident. He would have taken possession of her. He would have discarded your bandages and hartshorn, and what not; when it was Mary Avon's foot that was concerned—it was intimated to us—he would have had his own way in spite of all comers.

"I wish I had known," she says, timidly, meaning that it was the treatment she wished she had known.

"There is a more heroic remedy," said he, with a smile; "and that is walking the sprain off. I believe that can be done, but most people would shrink from the pain. Of course, if it were done at all, it would be done by a woman; women can bear pain infinitely better than men."

"Oh, do you think so!" she says, in mild protest. "Oh, I am sure not. Men are so much braver than women, so much stronger——"

But this gentle quarrel is suddenly stopped, for some one calls attention to a deer that is calmly browsing on one of the high slopes above that rocky shore, and instantly all glasses are in request. It is a hind, with a beautifully shaped head and slender legs; she takes no notice of the passing craft, but continues her feeding, walking a few steps onwards from time to time. In this way she reaches the edge of a gully in the rugged cliffs where there is some brushwood, and

probably a stream; into this she sedately descends, and we see her no more.

Then there is another cry; what is this cloud ahead, or waterspout resting on the calm bosom of the sea? Glasses again in request, amid many exclamations, reveal to us that this is a dense cloud of birds; a flock so vast that towards the water it seems black; can it be the dead body of a whale that has collected this world of wings from all the Northern seas? Hurry on, *White Dove;* for the floating cloud with the black base is moving and seething—in fantastic white fumes, as it were—in the loveliness of this summer day. And now, as we draw nearer, we can descry that there is no dead body of a whale causing that blackness; but only the density of the mass of seafowl. And nearer and nearer as we draw, behold! the great gannets swooping down in such numbers that the sea is covered with a mist of waterspouts; and the air is filled with innumerable cries; and we do not know what to make of this bewildering, fluttering, swimming, screaming mass of terns, guillemots, skarts, kittiwakes, razorbills, puffins, and gulls. But they draw away again. The herring-shoal is moving northward. The murmur of cries becomes more remote, and the seething cloud of the sea-birds is slowly dispersing. When the *White Dove* sails up to the spot at which this phenomenon was first seen, there is nothing visible but a scattered assemblage of guillemots—*kurroo! kurroo!* answered by *pe-yoo-it! pe-yoo-it!*—and great gannets—"as big as a sheep," says John of Skye—apparently so gorged that they lie on the water within stone's-throw of the yacht, before spreading out their long, snow-white, black-tipped wings to bear them away over the sea.

And now, as we are altering our course to the west—far away to our right stand the vast Coolins of Skye—we sail along the northern shores of Rum. There is no trace of any habitation visible; nothing but the precipitous cliffs, and the sandy bays, and the out-

standing rocks dotted with rows of shining black skarts. When Mary Avon asks why those sandy bays should be so red, and why a certain ruddy warmth of colour should shine through even the patches of grass, our F.R.S. begins to speak of powdered basalt rubbed down from the rocks above. He would have her begin another sketch, but she is too proud of her newly acquired knowledge to forsake the tiller.

The wind is now almost dead aft, and we have a good deal of gybing. Other people might think that all this gybing was an evidence of bad steering on the part of our new skipper; but Angus Sutherland—and we cannot contradict an F.R.S.—assures Miss Avon that she is doing remarkably well; and, as he stands by to lay hold of the main sheet when the boom swings over, we are not in much danger of carrying away either port or star-board davits.

"Do you know," says he lightly, "I sometimes think I ought to apply for the post of surgeon on board a man-of-war? That would just suit me——"

"Oh, I hope you will not," she blurts out, quite inadvertently; and thereafter there is a deep blush on her face.

"I should enjoy it immensely, I know," says he, wholly ignorant of her embarrassment, because he is keeping an eye on the sails. "I believe I should have more pleasure in life that way than any other——"

"But you do not live for your own pleasure," says she hastily, perhaps to cover her confusion.

"I have no one else to live for, any way," says he with a laugh; and then he corrected himself. "Oh, yes, I have. My father is a sad heretic. He has fallen away from the standards of his faith; he has set up idols —the diplomas and medals I have got from time to time. He has them all arranged in his study, and I have heard that he positively sits down before them and worships them. When I sent him the medal from Vienna—it was only bronze—he returned to me his

Greek Testament, that he had interleaved and annotated when he was a student; I believe it was his greatest possession."

"And you would give up all that he expects from you to go away and be a doctor on board a ship!" says Mary Avon, with some proud emphasis. "That would not be my ambition if I were a man, and—and—if I had—if——"

Well, she could not quite say to Brose's face what she thought of his powers and prospects; so she suddenly broke away and said—

"Yes; you would go and do that for your own amusement? And what would the amusement be? Do you think they would let the doctor interfere with the sailing of the ship?"

"Well," said he, laughing, "that is a practical objection. I don't suppose the captain of a man-of-war or even of a merchant vessel would be as accommodating as your John of Skye. Captain John has his compensation when he is relieved; he can go forward, and light his pipe."

"Well, I think for *your father's sake*," says Miss Avon, with decision, "you had better put that idea out of your head, once and for all."

Now blow, breezes, blow! What is the great headland that appears, striking out into the wide Atlantic?

Ahead she goes! the land she knows!
Behold! the snowy shores of Canna!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together,
Ho, ro, clansmen!

"Tom Galbraith," the Laird is saying solemnly to his hostess, "has assured me that Rum is the most picturesque island on the whole of the western coast of Scotland. That is his deleeberate opinion. And indeed I would not go so far as to say he was wrong. Arran! They talk about Arran! Just look at those

splendid mountains coming sheer down to the sea; and the light of the sun on them! Eh, me, what a sunset there will be this night!"

"Canna?" says Dr. Sutherland, to his interlocutor, who seems very anxious to be instructed. "Oh, I don't know. *Canna* in Gaelic is simply a can; but then *Cana* is a whale; and the island in the distance looks long and flat on the water. Or it may be from *canach*—that is, the moss-cotton; or from *cannach*—that is, the sweet-gale. You see, Miss Avon, ignorant people have an ample choice."

Blow! breezes, blow! as the yellow light of the afternoon shines over the broad Atlantic. Here are the eastern shores of Canna, high and rugged, and dark with caves; and there the western shores of Rum, the mighty mountains aglow in the evening light. And this remote and solitary little bay, with its green headlands, and its awkward rocks at the mouth, and the one house presiding over it amongst that shining wilderness of shrubs and flowers? Here is fair shelter for the night.

After dinner, in the lambent twilight, we set out with the gig; and there was much preparation of elaborate contrivances for the entrapping of fish. But the Laird's occult and intricate tackle—the spinning minnows, and spoons, and india-rubber sand-eels—proved no competitor for the couple of big white flies that Angus Sutherland had busked. And of course Mary Avon had that rod; and when some huge lithe dragged the end of the rod fairly under water, and when she cried aloud, "Oh! oh! I can't hold it; he'll break the rod!" then arose our Doctor's word of command:—

"Haul him in! Shove out the butt! No scientific playing with a lithe! Well done!—well done!—a five-pounder I'll bet ten farthings!"

It was not scientific fishing; but we got big fish—which is of more importance in the eyes of Master Fred. And then, as the night fell, we set out again

for the yacht; and the Doctor pulled stroke; and he sang some more verses of the *biorlinn* song as the blades dashed fire into the rushing sea:—

Proudly o'er the waves we'll bound her,
As the staghound bounds the heather!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together,
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Through the eddying tide we'll guide her,
Round each isle and breezy headland,
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together,
Ho, ro, clansmen!

The yellow lamp at the bow of the yacht grew larger and larger; the hull of the boat looked black between us and the starlit heavens; as we clambered on board there was a golden glow from the saloon skylight. And then, during the long and happy evening, amid all the whist-playing and other amusements going forward, what about certain timid courtesies and an occasional shy glance between those two young people? Some of us began to think that if the Laird's scheme was to come to anything, it was high time that Mr. Howard Smith put in an appearance.

CHAPTER IX.

A WILD STUDIO.

THERE is a fine bustle of preparation next morning —for the gig is waiting by the side of the yacht; and Dr. Sutherland is carefully getting our artist's materials into the stern; and the Laird is busy with shawls and water-proofs; and Master Fred brings along the

luncheon-basket. Our Admiral-in-chief prefers to stay on board; she has letters to write; there are enough of us to go and be tossed on the Atlantic swell off the great caves of Canna.

And as the men strike their oars in the water and we wave a last adieu, the Laird catches a glimpse of our larder at the stern of the yacht. Alas! there is but one remaining piece of fresh meat hanging there, under the white canvas.

"It reminds me," says he, beginning to laugh already, "of a good one that Tom Galbraith told me —a real good one that was. Tom had a little bit yacht that his man and himself sailed when he was painting, ye know; and one day they got into a bay where Duncan—that was the man's name—had some friends ashore. Tom left him in charge of the yacht; and—and—ha! ha! ha!—there was a leg of mutton hanging at the stern. Well, Tom was rowed ashore; and painted all day; and came back to the yacht in the afternoon. *There was no leg of mutton!* 'Duncan,' says he, 'where is the leg of mutton?' Duncan pretended to be vastly surprised. 'Iss it away?' says he. 'Away?' says Tom. 'Don't you see it is away? I want to know who took it!' Duncan looked all round him—at the sea and the sky—and then says he —then says he, 'Maybe it wass a dog!'—ha! ha! hee! hee! hee!—'maybe it wass a dog,' says he; and they were half a mile from the shore! I never see the canvas at the stern of a yacht without thinking o' Tom Galbraith and the leg of mutton;" and here the Laird laughed long and loud again.

"I have heard you speak once or twice about Tom Galbraith," remarked our young Doctor, without meaning the least sarcasm; "he is an artist, I suppose?"

The Laird stopped laughing. There was a look of indignant wonder—approaching to horror—on his face. But when he proceeded, with some dignity and even resentment, to explain to this ignorant person the

immense importance of the school that Tom Galbraith had been chiefly instrumental in forming; and the high qualities of that artist's personal work; and how the members of the Royal Academy shook in their shoes at the mere mention of Tom Galbraith's name, he became more pacified; for Angus Sutherland listened with great respect, and even promised to look out for Mr. Galbraith's work if he passed through Edinburgh on his way to the south.

The long, swinging stroke of the men soon took us round the successive headlands until we were once more in the open, with the mountains of Skye in the north, and, far away at the horizon, a pale line which we knew to be North Uist. And now the green shores of Canna were becoming more precipitous; and there was a roaring of the sea along the spurs of black rock; and the long Atlantic swell, breaking on the bows of the gig, was sending a little more spray over us than was at all desirable. Certainly no one who could have seen the Doctor at this moment—with his fresh-coloured face dripping with the salt water and shining in the sunlight—would have taken him for a hard-worked and anxious student. His hard work was pulling stroke-oar, and he certainly put his shoulders into it, as the Laird had remarked; and his sole anxiety was about Mary Avon's art-materials. That young lady shook the water from the two blank canvases, and declared it did not matter a bit.

These lonely cliffs!—becoming more grim and awful every moment, as this mite of a boat still wrestles with the great waves, and makes its way along the coast. And yet there are tender greens where the pasturage appears on the high plateaus; and there is a soft ruddy hue where the basalt shines. The gloom of the picture appears below—in the caves washed out of the conglomerate by the heavy seas; in the spurs and fantastic pillars and arches of the black rock; and in this leaden-hued Atlantic springing high over every

obstacle to go roaring and booming into the caverns. And these innumerable white specks on the sparse green plateaus and on this high promontory: can they be mushrooms in millions? Suddenly one of the men lifts his oar from the rowlock, and rattles it on the gunwale of the gig. At this sound a cloud rises from the black rocks; it spreads; the next moment the air is darkened over our heads; and almost before we know what has happened, this vast multitude of puffins has wheeled by us, and wheeled again further out to sea—a smoke of birds! And as we watch them, behold! stragglers come back—in thousands upon thousands—the air is filled with them—some of them swooping so near us that we can see the red parrot-like beak and the orange-hued web-feet, and then again the green shelves of grass and the pinnacles of rock become dotted with those white specks. The myriads of birds; the black caverns; the arches and spurs of rock; the leaden-hued Atlantic bounding and springing in white foam: what says Mary Avon to that? Has she the courage?

"If you can put me ashore?" says she.

"Oh, we will get you ashore, somehow," Dr. Sutherland answers.

But, indeed, the nearer we approach that ugly coast the less we like the look of it. Again and again we make for what should be a sheltered bit; but long before we can get to land we can see through the plunging sea great masses of yellow, which we know to be the barnacled rock; and then ahead we find a shore that, in this heavy surf, would make match-wood of the gig in three seconds. Our Doctor, however, will not give in. If he cannot get the gig on to any beach or into any creek, he will land our artist somehow. And at last—and in spite of the remonstrances of John of Skye—he insists on having the boat backed in to a projecting mass of conglomerate, all yellowed over with small shell-fish, against which the sea is

beating heavily. It is an ugly landing-place; we can see the yellow rock go sheer down in the clear green sea; and the surf is spouting up the side in white jets. But if she can watch a high wave, and put her foot there—and there—will she not find herself directly on a plateau of rock at least twelve feet square?

"Back her, John!—back her!—" and therewith the Doctor, watching his chance, scrambles out and up to demonstrate the feasibility of the thing. And the easel is handed out to him; and the palette and canvases; and finally Mary Avon herself. Nay, even the Laird will adventure, sending on before him the luncheon-basket.

It is a strange studio—this projecting shell-crusted rock, surrounded on three sides by the sea, and on the fourth by an impassable cliff. And the sound beneath our feet—there must be some subterranean passage or cave into which the sea roars and booms. But Angus Sutherland rigs up the easel rapidly; and arranges the artist's camp-stool; and sets her fairly agoing; then he proposes to leave the Laird in charge of her. He and the humble chronicler of the adventures of these people mean to have some further exploration of this wild coast.

But we had hardly gone a quarter of a mile or so—it was hard work pulling in this heavy sea—when the experienced eye of Sandy from Islay saw that something was wrong.

"What's that?" he said, staring.

We turned instantly, and strove to look through the mists of spray. Where we had left the Laird and Mary Avon there were now visible only two mites, apparently not bigger than puffins. But is not one of the puffins gesticulating wildly?

"Round with her, John!" the Doctor calls out. "They want us—I'm sure."

And away the gig goes again—plunging into the great troughs and then swinging up to the giddy crests.

And as we get nearer and nearer, what is the meaning of the Laird's frantic gestures? We cannot understand him; and it is impossible to hear, for the booming of the sea into the caves drowns his voice.

"He has lost his hat," says Angus Sutherland; and then, the next second, "Where's the easel?"

Then we understand those wild gestures. Pull away, merry men! for has not a squall swept the studio of its movables? And there, sure enough, tossing high and low on the waves, we descry a variety of things—an easel, two canvases, a hat, a veil, and what not. Up with the boat-hook to the bow; and gently with those plunges, you eager Hector of Moidart!

"I am so sorry," she says (or rather shrieks), when her dripping property is restored to her.

"It was my fault," our Doctor yells; "but I will undertake to fasten your easel properly this time"—and therewith he fetches a lump of rock that might have moored a man-of-war.

We stay and have luncheon in this gusty and thunderous studio—though Mary Avon will scarcely turn from her canvas. And there is no painting of pink geraniums about this young woman's work. We see already that she has got a thorough grip of this cold hard coast (the sun is obscured now, and the various hues are more sombre than ever); and, though she has not had time as yet to try to catch the motion of the rolling sea, she has got the colour of it—a leaden-grey, with glints of blue and white, and with here and there a sudden splash of deep, rich, glassy, bottle green, where some wave for a moment catches, just as it gets to the shore, a reflection from the grass plateaus above. Very good, Miss Avon; very good—but we pretend that we are not looking.

Then away we go again, to leave the artist to her work; and we go as near as possible—the high sea will not allow us to enter—the vast black caverns; and we watch through the clear water for those masses

of yellow rock. And then the multitudes of white-breasted, red-billed birds perched up there—close to the small burrows in the scant grass; they jerk their heads about in a watchful way just like the prairie-dogs at the mouth of their sandy habitations on the Colorado plains. And then again a hundred or two of them come swooping down from the rocky pinnacles and sail over our heads—twinkling bits of colour between the grey-green sea and the blue-and-white of the sky. They resent the presence of strangers in this far-home of the sea-birds.

It is a terrible business getting that young lady and her paraphernalia back into the gig again; for the sea is still heavy, and, of course, additional care has now to be taken of the precious canvas. But at last she, and the Laird, and the luncheon-basket, and everything else have been got on board; and away we go for the yacht again, in the now clearing afternoon. As we draw further away from the roar of the caves, it is more feasible to talk; and naturally we are all very complimentary about Mary Avon's sketch in oils.

"Ay," says the Laird, "and it wants but one thing; and I am sure I could get Tom Galbraith to put that in for you. A bit of a yacht, ye know, or other sailing vessel, put below the cliffs, would give people a notion of the height of the cliffs, do ye see? I am sure I could get Tom Galbraith to put that in for ye."

"I hope Miss Avon won't let Tom Galbraith or anybody else meddle with the picture," says Angus Sutherland, with some emphasis. "Why, a yacht! Do you think anybody would let a yacht come close to rocks like these! As soon as you introduce any making-up like that, the picture is a sham. It is the real thing now, as it stands. Twenty years hence you could take up that piece of canvas, and there before you would be the very day that you spent here—it would be like finding your old life of twenty years before opened up to you with a lightning-flash. The

picture is—why I should say it is invaluable, as it stands."

At this somewhat fierce praise, Mary Avon colours a little. And then she says with a gentle hypocrisy—

"Oh, do you really think there is—there is—some likeness to the place?"

"It is the place itself!" says he warmly.

"Because," she says, timidly, and yet with a smile, "one likes to have one's work appreciated, however stupid it may be. And—and—if you think that—would you like to have it? Because I should be so proud if you would take it—only I am ashamed to offer my sketches to anybody——"

"That!" said he, staring at the canvas as if the mines of Golconda were suddenly opened to him. But then he drew back. "Oh, no," he said; "you are very kind—but—but, you know, I cannot. You would think I had been asking for it."

"Well," says Miss Avon, still looking down, "I never was treated like this before. You won't take it? You don't think it is worth putting in your portmanteau?"

At this the young Doctor's face grew very red; but he said boldly—

"Very well, now, if you have been playing fast and loose, you shall be punished. I *will* take the picture, whether you grudge it me or not. And I don't mean to give it up now."

"Oh," said she, very gently, "if it reminds you of the place, I shall be very pleased—and—and it may remind you too that I am not likely to forget your kindness to poor Mrs. Thompson."

And so this little matter was amicably settled—though the Laird looked with a covetous eye on that rough sketch of the rocks of Canna, and regretted that he was not to be allowed to ask Tom Galbraith to put in a touch or two. And so back to the yacht, and to dinner in the silver clear evening; and how beautiful

looked this calm bay of Canna, with its glittering waters and green shores, after the grim rocks and the heavy Atlantic waves!

That evening we pursued the innocent lithe again—our larder was becoming terribly empty—and there was a fine take. But of more interest to some of us than the big fish was the extraordinary wonder of colour in sea and sky when the sun had gone down; and there was a wail on the part of the Laird that Mary Avon had not her colours with her to put down some jotting for further use. Or if on paper: might not she write down something of what she saw; and experiment thereafter? Well, if any artist can make head or tail of words in such a case as this, here they are for him—as near as our combined forces of observation could go.

The vast plain of water around us a blaze of salmon-red—with the waves (catching the reflection of the zenith) marked in horizontal lines of blue. The great headland of Canna, between us and the western sky, a mass of dark, intense olive-green. The sky over that a pale, clear lemon-yellow. But the great feature of this evening scene was a mass of cloud that stretched all across the heavens—a mass of flaming, thunderous, orange-red cloud that began in the far pale mists in the east, and came across the blue zenith overhead, burning with a splendid glory there, and then stretched over to the west, where it narrowed down and was lost in the calm, clear gold of the horizon. The splendour of this great cloud was bewildering to the eyes; one turned gratefully to the reflection of it in the sultry red of the sea below, broken by the blue lines of waves. Our attention was not wholly given to the fishing or the boat on this lambent evening; perhaps that was the reason we ran on a rock, and with difficulty got off again.

Then back to the yacht again about eleven o'clock. What is this terrible news from Master Fred, who was sent off with instructions to hunt up any stray crofter

he might find, and use such persuasions in the shape of Gaelic friendliness and English money as would enable us to replenish our larder? What! that he had walked two miles and seen nothing eatable or purchasable but an old hen? Canna is a beautiful place; but we begin to think it is time to be off.

On this still night, with the stars coming out, we cannot go below. We sit on deck and listen to the musical whisper along the shore, and watch one golden-yellow planet rising over the dusky peaks of Rum, far in the east. And our young Doctor is talking of the pathetic notices that are common in the Scotch papers —in the advertisements of deaths. "*New Zealand papers, please copy.*" "*Canadian papers, please copy.*" When you see this prayer appended to the announcement of the death of some old woman of seventy or seventy-five, do you not know that it is a message to loved ones in distant climes, wanderers who may forget but who have not been forgotten? They are messages that tell of a scattered race—of a race that once filled the glens of these now almost deserted islands. And surely, when some birthday or other time of recollection comes round, those far away,

Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe,

must surely bethink themselves of the old people left behind—living in Glasgow or Greenock now, perhaps —and must bethink themselves too of the land where last they saw the bonny red heather, and where last they heard the pipes playing the sad *Farewell, MacCruimin*, as the ship stood out to sea. They cannot quite forget the scenes of their youth—the rough seas and the red heather and the islands; the wild dancing at the weddings; the secret meetings in the glen, with Ailasa, or Morag, or Mairi, come down from the sheiling, all alone, a shawl round her head to shelter her from the rain, her heart fluttering like the heart of a timid fawn. They cannot forget.

And we, too, we are going away; and it may be that we shall never see this beautiful bay or the island there again. But one of us carries away with him a talisman for the sudden revival of old memories. And twenty years hence—that was his own phrase—what will Angus Sutherland—perhaps a very great and rich person by that time—what will he think when he turns to a certain picture, and recalls the long summer day when he rowed with Mary Avon round the wild shores of Canna?

CHAPTER X.

"DUNVEGAN!—OH! DUNVEGAN!"

COMMANDER MARY AVON sends her orders below: everything to be made snug in the cabins, for there is a heavy sea running outside, and the *White Dove* is already under way. Farewell, then, you beautiful blue bay—all rippled into silver now with the breeze—and green shores and picturesque cliffs! We should have lingered here another day or two, perhaps, but for the report about that one old hen. We cannot ration passengers and crew on one old hen.

And here, as we draw away from Canna, is the vast panorama of the sea-world around us once more—the mighty mountain range of Skye shining faintly in the northern skies; Haleval and Haskeval still of a gloomy purple in the east; and away beyond these leagues of rushing Atlantic the clear blue line of North Uist. Whither are we bound, then, you small captain with the pale face and the big, soft, tender black eyes? Do you fear a shower of spray that you have strapped that tightly-fitting ulster round the graceful small figure? And are you quite sure that you know whether the wind is on the port or starboard beam?

"Look! look! look!" she calls, and our F.R.S., who has been busy over the charts, jumps to his feet.

Just at the bow of the vessel we see the great shining black thing disappear. What if there had been a collision?

"You cannot call *that* a porpoise, any way," says she. "Why, it must have been eighty feet long!"

"Yes, yacht measurement," says he. "But it had a back fin, which is suspicious, and it did not blow. Now," he adds—for we have been looking all round for the re-appearance of the huge stranger—"if you want to see real whales at work, just look over there, close under Rum. I should say there was a whole shoal of them in the Sound."

And there, sure enough, we see from time to time the white spoutings—rising high into the air in the form of the letter V, and slowly falling again. They are too far away for us to hear the sound of their blowing, nor can we catch any glimpse, through the best of our glasses, of their appearance at the surface. Moreover, the solitary stranger that nearly ran against our bows makes no reappearance; he has had enough of the wonders of the upper world for a time.

It is a fine sailing morning, and we pay but little attention to the fact that the wind, as usual, soon gets to be dead ahead. So long as the breeze blows, and the sun shines, and the white spray flies from the bows of the *White Dove*, what care we which harbour is to shelter us for the night? And if we cannot get into any harbour, what then? We carry our own kingdom with us; and we are far from being dependent on the one old hen.

But in the midst of much laughing at one of the Laird's good ones—the inexhaustible Homesh was again to the fore—a head appears at the top of the companion-way; and there is a respectful silence. Unseemly mirth dies away before the awful dignity of this person.

"Angus," she says, with a serious remonstrance on her face, "Do you believe what scientific people tell you?"

Angus Sutherland starts, and looks up; he has been deep in a chart of Loch Bracadaile.

"Don't they say that water finds its own level? Now do you call this water finding its own level?"—and as she propounds this conundrum, she clings on tightly to the side of the companion, for, in truth, the *White Dove* is curvetting a good deal among those great masses of waves.

"Another tumbler broken!" she exclaims. "Now who left that tumbler on the table?"

"I know," says Mary Avon.

"Who was it then?" says the occupant of the companion-way; and we begin to tremble for the culprit.

"Why, you yourself!"

"Mary Avon, how can you tell such a story!" says the other, with a stern face.

"Oh, but that is so," calls out our Doctor, "for I myself saw you bring the tumbler out of the ladies' cabin with water for the flowers."

The universal shout of laughter that overwhelms Madame Dignity is too much for her. A certain conscious, lurking smile begins to break through the sternness of her face.

"I don't believe a word of it," she declares, firing a shot as she retreats. "Not a word of it. You are two conspirators. To tell such astory about a tumbler—!"

But at this moment a further assault is made on the majesty of this imperious small personage. There is a thunder at the bows; a rattling as of pistol-shots on the decks forward; and at the same moment the fag-ends of the spray come flying over the after part of the yacht. What becomes of one's dignity when one gets a shower of salt water over one's head and neck? Go down below, madam!—retreat, retreat,

discomfited!—go, dry your face and your bonny brown hair—and bother us no more with your broken tumbler!

And despite those plunging seas and the occasional showers of spray, Mary Avon still clings bravely to the rope that is round the tiller; and as we are bearing over for Skye on one long tack, she has no need to change her position. And if from time to time her face gets wet with the salt water, is it not quickly dried again in the warm sun and the breeze? Sun and salt water and sea-air will soon chase away the pallor from that gentle face: cannot one observe already—after only a few days' sailing—a touch of sun-brown on her cheeks?

And now we are drawing nearer and nearer to Skye, and before us lies the lonely Loch Breatal, just under the splendid Coolins. See how the vast slopes of the mountains appear to come sheer down to the lake; and there is a soft, sunny green on them—a beautiful, tender, warm colour that befits a summer day. But far above and beyond those sunny slopes a different sight appears. All the clouds of this fair day have gathered round the upper portions of the mountains; and that solitary range of black and jagged peaks is dark in shadow, dark as if with the expectation of thunder. The Coolins are not beloved of mariners. Those beautiful sunlit ravines are the secret haunts of hurricanes that suddenly come out to strike the unwary yachtsman as with the blow of a hammer. *Stand by, forward, then, lads! About ship! Down with the helm, Captain Avon!*—and behold! we are sailing away from the black Coolins, and ahead of us there is only the open sea, and the sunlight shining on the far cliffs of Canna.

"When your course is due north," remarks Angus Sutherland, who has relieved Mary Avon at the helm, "and when the wind is due north, you get a good deal of sailing for your money."

The profound truth of this remark becomes more

and more apparent as the day passes in a series of long tacks which do not seem to be bringing those far headlands of Skye much nearer to us. And if we are beating in this heavy sea all day and night, is there not a chance of one or other of our women-folk collapsing? They are excellent sailors, to be sure—but—but——

Dr. Sutherland is consulted. Dr. Sutherland's advice is prompt and emphatic. His sole and only precaution against sea-sickness is simple: resolute eating and drinking. Cure for sea-sickness, after it has set in, he declares there is none: to prevent it, eat and drink, and let the drink be *brut* champagne. So our two prisoners are ordered below to undergo that punishment.

And, perhaps, it is the *brut* champagne, or perhaps it is merely the snugness of our little luncheon-party, that prompts Miss Avon to remark on the exceeding selfishness of yachting, and to suggest a proposal that fairly takes away our breath by its audacity.

"Now," she says, cheerfully, "I could tell you how you could occupy an idle day on board a yacht so that you would give a great deal of happiness—quite a shock of delight—to a large number of people."

Well, we are all attention.

"At what cost?" says the financier of our party.

"At no cost."

This is still more promising. Why should not we instantly set about making all those people happy?

"All that you have got to do is to get a copy of the *Field* or of the *Times* or some such paper."

Yes; and how are we to get any such thing? Rum has no post-office. No mail calls at Canna. Newspapers do not grow on the rocks of Loch Bracadaile.

"However, let us suppose that we have the paper."

"Very well. All you have to do is to sit down and take the advertisements, and write to the people, accepting all their offers on their own terms. The

man who wants 500*l.* for his shooting in the autumn; the man who will sell his steam-yacht for 7,000*l.*; the curate who will take in another youth to board at 200*l.* a year; the lady who wants to let her country-house during the London season; all the people who are anxious to sell things. You offer to take them all. If a man has a yacht to let on hire, you will pay for new jerseys for the men. If a man has a house to be let, you will take all the fixtures at his own valuation. All you have to do is to write two or three hundred letters—as an anonymous person, of course—and you make two or three hundred people quite delighted for perhaps a whole week!"

The Laird stared at this young lady as if she had gone mad; but there was only a look of complacent friendliness on Mary Avon's face.

"You mean that you write sham letters?" says her hostess. "You gull those unfortunate people into believing that all their wishes are realised?"

"But you make them happy!" says Mary Avon, confidently.

"Yes—and the disappointment afterwards!" retorts her friend, almost with indignation. "Imagine their disappointment when they find they have been duped! Of course they would write letters and discover that the anonymous person had no existence."

"Oh, no!" says Mary Avon, eagerly. "There could be no such great disappointment. The happiness would be definite and real for the time. The disappointment would only be a slow and gradual thing when they found no answer coming to their letter. You would make them happy for a whole week or so by accepting their offer; whereas by not answering their letter or letters you would only puzzle them, and the matter would drop away into forgetfulness. Do you not think it would be an excellent scheme?"

Come on deck, you people; this girl has got demented. And behold! as we emerge once more into

the sunlight and whirling spray and wind, we find that we are nearing Skye again on the port tack, and now it is the mouth of Loch Bracadaile that we are approaching. And these pillars of rock, outstanding from the cliffs, and worn by the northern seas?

"Why, these must be Macleod's Maidens!" says Angus Sutherland, unrolling one of the charts.

And then he discourses to us of the curious fancies of sailors—passing the lonely coasts from year to year—and recognising as old friends, not any living thing, but the strange conformations of the rocks—and giving to these the names of persons and of animals. And he thinks there is something more weird and striking about these solitary and sea-worn rocks fronting the great Atlantic than about any comparatively modern Sphinx or Pyramid; until we regard the sunlit pillars, and their fretted surface and their sharp shadows, with a sort of morbid imagination; and we discover how the sailors have fancied them to be stone women; and we see in the largest of them—her head and shoulder tilted over a bit—some resemblance to the position of the Venus discovered at Milo. All this is very fine; but suddenly the sea gets darkened over there; a squall comes roaring out of Loch Bracadaile; John of Skye orders the boat about; and presently we are running free before this puff from the north-east. Alas! alas! we have no sooner got out of the reach of the squall than the wind backs to the familiar north, and our laborious beating has to be continued as before.

But we are not discontented. Is it not enough, as the golden and glowing afternoon wears on, to listen to the innocent prattle of Denny-mains, whose mind has been fired by the sight of those pillars of rock. He tells us a great many remarkable things—about the similarity between Gaelic and Irish, and between Welsh and Armorican; and he discusses the use of the Druidical stones, as to whether the priests followed

serpent-worship or devoted those circles to human sacrifice. He tells us about the Picts and Scots; about Fingal and Ossian; about the doings of Arthur in his kingdom of Strathclyde. It is a most innocent sort of prattle.

"Yes, sir," says our Doctor—quite gravely—though we are not quite sure that he is not making fun of our simple-hearted Laird, "there can be no doubt that the Aryan race that first swept over Europe spoke a Celtic language, more or less akin to Gaelic, and that they were pushed out, by successive waves of population, into Brittany, and Wales, and Ireland, and the Highlands. And I often wonder whether it was they themselves that modestly call themselves the foreigners or strangers, and affixed that name to the land they laid hold of, from Galicia and Gaul to Galloway and Galway? The Gaelic word *gall*, a stranger, you find everywhere. Fingal himself is only *Fionn-gall*—the Fair Stranger; *Dubh-gall*—that is, the familiar Dugald—or the Black Stranger—is what the Islay people call a Lowlander. *Ru-na-Gaul*, that we passed the other day—that is the Foreigner's Point. I think there can be no doubt that the tribes that first brought Aryan civilisation through the west of Europe spoke Gaelic or something like Gaelic."

"Ay," said the Laird, doubtfully. He was not sure of this young man. He had heard something about Gaelic being spoken in the Garden of Eden, and suspected there might be a joke lying about somewhere.

However, there was no joking about our F.R.S. when he began to tell Mary Avon how, if he had time and sufficient interest in such things, he would set to work to study the Basque people and their language—that strange remnant of the old race who inhabited the west of Europe long before Scot, or Briton, or Roman, or Teuton had made his appearance on the scene. Might they not have traditions, or customs, or

verbal survivals to tell us of their pre-historic forefathers? The Laird seemed quite shocked to hear that his favourite Picts and Scots—and Fingal and Arthur and all the rest of them—were mere modern interlopers. What of the mysterious race that occupied these islands before the great Aryan tide swept over from the East?

Well, this was bad enough; but when the Doctor proceeded to declare his conviction that no one had the least foundation for the various conjectures about the purposes of those so-called Druidical stones—that it was all a matter of guess-work whether as regarded council-halls, grave-stones, altars, or serpent-worship—and that it was quite possible these stones were erected by the non-Aryan race who inhabited Europe before either Gaul or Roman or Teuton came west, the Laird interrupted him, triumphantly—

"But," says he, "the very names of those stones show they are of Celtic origin—will ye dispute that? What is the meaning of *Carnac*, that is in Brittany—eh? Ye know Gaelic?"

"Well, I know that much," said Angus, laughing. "Carnac means simply the place of piled stones. But the Celts may have found the stones there, and given them that name."

"I think," says Miss Avon profoundly, "that when you go into a question of names, you can prove anything. And I suppose Gaelic is as accommodating as any other language."

Angus Sutherland did not answer for a moment; but at last he said, rather shyly—

"Gaelic is a very complimentary language, at all events. *Bean* is 'a woman;' and *beannachd* is 'a blessing.' *An ti a bheannaich thu*—that is, 'the one who blessed you.'"

Very pretty; only we did not know how wildly the young man might not be falsifying Gaelic grammar in order to say something nice to Mary Avon.

Patience works wonders. Dinner-time finds us so far across the Minch that we can make out the light-house of South Uist. And all these outer Hebrides are now lying in a flood of golden-red light; and on the cliffs of Canna, far away in the south-east, and now dwarfed so that they lie like a low wall on the sea, there is a paler red, caught from the glare of the sun-set. And here is the silver tinkle of Master Fred's bell.

On deck after dinner; and the night air is cooler now; and there are cigars about; and our young F.R.S. is at the tiller; and Mary Avon is singing, apparently to herself, something about a Berkshire farmer's daughter. The darkness deepens, and the stars come out; and there is one star—larger than the rest, and low down, and burning a steady red—that we know to be Ushinish lighthouse. And then from time to time the silence is broken by, "*Stand by, forrard! 'Bout ship!*" and there is a rattling of blocks and cordage and then the head-sails fill and away she goes again on the other tack. We have got up to the long headlands of Skye at last.

Clear as the night is, the wind still comes in squalls, and we have the topsail down. Into which indentation of that long, low line of dark land shall we creep in the darkness?

But John of Skye keeps away from the land. It is past midnight. There is nothing visible but the black sea and the clear sky, and the red star of the light-house; nothing audible but Mary Avon's humming to herself and her friend—the two women sit arm-in-arm under half-a-dozen of rugs—some old-world ballad to the monotonous accompaniment of the passing seas.

One o'clock: Ushinish light is smaller now, a minute point of red fire, and the black line of land on our right looms larger in the dusk. Look at the splendour of the phosphorous-stars on the rushing waves.

And at last John of Skye says in an undertone to Angus—

"Will the leddies be going below now?"

"Going below!" he says in reply. "They are waiting till we get to anchor. We must be just off Dunvegan Loch now."

Then John of Skye makes his confession.

"Oh, yes; I been into Dunvegan Loch more as two or three times; but I not like the dark to be with us in going in; and if we lie off till the daylight comes, the leddies they can go below to their peds. And if Dr. Sutherland himself would like to see the channel in going in, will I send below when the daylight comes?"

"No, no, John; thank you," is the answer. "When I turn in, I turn in for good. I will leave you to find out the channel for yourself."

And so there is a clearance of the deck, and rugs and camp-stools handed down the companion. *Deoch-an-doruis* in the candle-lit saloon? To bed—to bed!

It is about five o'clock in the morning that the swinging out of the anchor-chain causes the yacht to tremble from stem-to stern; and the sleepers start in their sleep, but are vaguely aware that they are at a safe anchorage at last. And do you know where the brave *White Dove* is lying now? Surely if the new dawn brings any stirring of wind—and if there is a sound coming over to us from this far land of legend and romance—it is the wild, sad wail of Dunvegan! The mists are clearing from the hills; the day breaks wan and fair; the great grey castle, touched by the early sunlight, looks down on the murmuring sea. And is it the sea, or is it the cold wind of the morning, that sings and sings to us in our dreams—

Dunvegan—oh! Dunvegan!

CHAPTER XI.

DRAWING NEARER.

SHE is all alone on deck. The morning sun shines on the beautiful blue bay; on the great castle perched on the rocks over there; and on the wooded green hills beyond. She has got a canvas fixed on her easel; she sings to herself as she works.

Now this English young lady must have beguiled the tedium of her long nursing in Edinburgh by making a particular acquaintance with Scotch ballads; or how otherwise could we account for her knowledge of the "Song of Ulva," and now of the "Song of Dunvegan?"

Macleod the faithful, and fearing none!
Dunvegan—oh! Dunvegan!

—she hums to herself as she is busy with this rough sketch of sea and shore. How can she be aware that Angus Sutherland is at this very moment in the companion way, and not daring to stir hand or foot lest he should disturb her?

Friends and foes had our passion thwarted,

she croons to herself, though, indeed, there is no despair at all in her voice, but a perfect contentment—

But true, tender, and lion-hearted,
Lived he on, and from life departed,
Macleod, whose rival is breathing none!
Dunvegan—oh, Dunvegan!

She is pleased with the rapidity of her work. She tries to whistle a little bit. Or, perhaps it is only the fresh morning air that has put her in such good spirits?

Yestreen the Queen had four Maries.

What has that got to do with the sketch of the shining grey castle? Among these tags and ends of ballads, the young Doctor at last becomes emboldened to put in an appearance.

"Good morning, Miss Avon," says he; "you are busy at work again?"

She is not in the least surprised. She has got accustomed to his coming on deck before the others; they have had a good deal of quiet chatting while as yet the Laird was only adjusting his high white collar and satin neckcloth.

"It is only a sketch," said she, in a rapid and highly business-like fashion, "but I think I shall be able to sell it. You know most people merely value pictures for their association with things they are interested in themselves. A Yorkshire farmer would rather have a picture of his favourite cob than any Raphael or Titian. And the ordinary English squire: I am sure that you know in his own heart he prefers one of Herring's farm-yard pieces to Leonardo's *Last Supper*. Well, if some yachting gentleman, who has been in this loch, should see this sketch, he will probably buy it, however bad it is, just because it interests him——"

"But you don't really mean to sell it?" said he.

"That depends," said she demurely, "on whether I get any offer for it."

"Why," he exclaimed, "the series of pictures you are now making should be an invaluable treasure to you all your life long: a permanent record of a voyage that you seem to enjoy very much. I almost shrink from robbing you of that one of Canna; still, the temptation is too great. And you propose to sell them all?"

"What I can sell of them," she says; and then she adds, rather shyly, "You know I could not very well afford to keep them all for myself. I—I have a good many almoners in London; and I devote to them what I can get for my scrawls—that is, I deduct the cost of

the frames, and keep the rest for them. It is not a large sum."

"Any other woman would spend it in jewellery and dresses," says he bluntly.

At this, Miss Mary Avon flushes slightly, and hastily draws his attention to a small boat that is approaching. Dr. Sutherland does not pay any heed to the boat.

He is silent for a second or so; and then he says, with an effort to talk in a cheerful and matter-of-fact way—

"You have not sent ashore yet this morning: don't you know there is a post-office at Dunvegan?"

"Oh, yes; I heard so. But the men are below at breakfast, I think, and I am in no hurry to send, for there won't be any letters for me, I know."

"Oh, indeed," he says, with seeming carelessness, "it must be a long time since you have heard from your friends."

"I have not many friends to hear from," she answers, with a light laugh, "and those I have don't trouble me with many letters. I suppose they think I am in very good hands at present."

"Oh, yes—no doubt," says he, and suddenly he begins to talk in warm terms of the delightfulness of the voyage. He is quite charmed with the appearance of Dunvegan Loch and castle. A more beautiful morning he never saw. And in the midst of all this enthusiasm the small boat comes alongside.

There is an old man in the boat, and when he has fastened his oars, he says a few words to Angus Sutherland, and hands up a big black bottle. Our young Doctor brings the bottle over to Mary Avon. He seems to be very much pleased with everything this morning.

"Now, is not that good-natured?" says he. "It is a bottle of fresh milk, with the compliments of ————, of Uginish. Isn't it good-natured?"

"Oh, indeed it is," says she, plunging her hand

into her pocket. "You must let me give the messenger half-a-crown."

"No, no; that is not the Highland custom," says the Doctor; and therewith he goes below, and fetches up another black bottle, and pours out a glass of whiskey with his own hand, and presents it to the ancient boatman. You should have seen the look of surprise in the old man's face when Angus Sutherland said something to him in the Gaelic.

And alas! and alas!—as we go ashore on this beautiful bright day, we have to give up for ever the old Dunvegan of many a dream—the dark and solitary keep that we had imagined perched high above the Atlantic breakers—the sheer precipices, the awful sterility, the wail of lamentation along the lonely shores. This is a different picture altogether that Mary Avon has been trying to put down on her canvas—a spacious, almost modern-looking, but nevertheless picturesque castle, sheltered from the winds by softly wooded hills, a bit of smooth, blue water below, and further along the shores the cheerful evidences of fertility and cultivation. The wail of Dunvegan? Why, here is a brisk and thriving village, with a post-office, and a shop, and a building that looks uncommonly like an inn; and there, dotted all about, and encroaching on the upper moorland, any number of those small crofts that were once the pride of the Highlands and that gave to England the most stalwart of her regiments. Here are no ruined huts and voiceless wastes; but a cheerful, busy picture of peasant-life; the strapping wenches at work in the small farmyards, well-built and frank of face; the men well clad; the children well fed and merry enough. It is a scene that delights the heart of our good friend of Dennymains. If we had but time, he would fain go in among the tiny farms, and inquire about the rent of the holdings, and the price paid for those picturesque little beasts that the artists are for ever painting—with a

louring sky beyond, and a dash of sunlight in front. But our Doctor is obdurate. He will not have Mary Avon walk further; she must return to the yacht.

But on our way back, as she is walking by the side of the road, he suddenly puts his hand on her arm, apparently to stop her. Slight as the touch is, she naturally looks surprised.

"I beg your pardon," he says, hastily, "but I thought you would rather not tread on it——"

He is regarding a weed by the wayside—a thing that looks like a snapdragon of some sort. We did not expect to find a hard-headed man of science betray this trumpery sentiment about a weed.

"I thought you would rather not tread upon it when you knew it was a stranger," he says, in explanation of that rude assault upon her arm. "That is not an English plant at all; it is the *Mimulus*, its real home is in America."

We began to look with more interest on the audacious small foreigner that had boldly adventured across the seas.

"Oh," she says, looking back along the road, "I hope I have not trampled any of them down."

"Well, it does not *much* matter," he admits, "for the plant is becoming quite common now in parts of the West Highlands; but I thought as it was a stranger, and come all the way across the Atlantic on a voyage of discovery, you would be hospitable. I suppose the Gulf-stream brought the first of them over."

"And if they had any choice in the matter," says Mary Avon, looking down, and speaking with a little self-conscious deliberation, "and if they wanted to be hospitably received, they showed their good sense in coming to the West Highlands."

After that there was a dead silence on the part of Angus Sutherland. But why should he have been embarrassed? There was no compliment levelled at him that he should blush like a schoolboy. It was

quite true that Miss Avon's liking—even love—for the West Highlands was becoming very apparent; but Banffshire is not in the West Highlands. What although Angus Sutherland could speak a few words in the Gaelic tongue to an old boatman? He came from Banff. Banffshire is not in the West Highlands.

Then that afternoon at the great castle itself: what have we but a confused recollection of twelfth-century towers; and walls nine feet thick; and ghost-chambers; and a certain fairy-flag, that is called the *Bratach-Sith;* and the wide view over the blue Atlantic; and of a great kindness that made itself visible in the way of hothouse flowers and baskets of fruit, and what not? The portraits, too: the various centuries got mixed up with the old legends, until we did not know in which face to look for some transmitted expression that might tell of the Cave of Uig or the Uamh-na-Ceann. But there was one portrait there, quite modern, and beautiful, that set all the tourist-folk a raving, so lovely were the life-like eyes of it; and the Laird was bold enough to say to the gentle lady who was so good as to be our guide, that it would be one of the greatest happinesses of his life if he might be allowed to ask Mr. Galbraith, the well-known artist of Edinburgh, to select a young painter to come up to Dunvegan and make a copy of this picture for him, Denny-mains. And Dr. Sutherland could scarcely come away from that beautiful face; and our good Queen T. was quite charmed with it; and as for Mary Avon, when one of us regarded her, behold! as she looked up, there was a sort of moisture in the soft black eyes.

What was she thinking of? That it must be a fine thing to be so beautiful a woman, and charm the eyes of all men? But now—now that we had had this singing-bird with us on board the yacht for so long a time—would any one of us have admitted that she was rather plain? It would not have gone well with any one who had ventured to say so to the Laird of

Denny-mains, at all events. And as for our sovereign-lady and mistress, these were the lines which she always said described Mary Avon:—

> Was never seen thing to be praised derre,[1]
> Nor under blackë cloud so bright a sterre,
> As she was, as they saiden, every one
> That her behelden in her blackë weed;
> And yet she stood, full low and still, alone,
> Behind all other folk, in little brede,[2]
> And nigh the door, ay under shamë's drede;
> Simple of bearing, debonair of cheer,
> With a full surë[3] looking and mannére.

How smart the saloon of the *White Dove* looked that evening at dinner, with those geraniums, and roses, and fuchsias, and what not, set amid the tender green of the maiden-hair fern! But all the same there was a serious discussion. Fruit, flowers, vegetables, and fresh milk, however welcome, fill no larder; and Master Fred had returned with the doleful tale that all his endeavours to purchase a sheep at one of the neighbouring farms had been of no avail. Forthwith we resolved to make another effort. Far away, on the outer shores of Dunvegan Loch, we can faintly descry, in the glow of the evening, some crofter's huts on the slopes of the hill. Down with the gig, then, boys; in with the fishing-rods; and away for the distant shores, where haply, some tender ewe-lamb, or brace of quacking duck, or some half-dozen half-starved fowls may be withdrawn from the reluctant tiller of the earth!

It is a beautiful clear evening, with lemon-gold glory in the north-west. And our stout-sinewed Doctor is rowing stroke, and there is a monotonous refrain of

> *Ho, ro, clansmen!*
> *A long, strong pull together—*
> *Ho, ro, clansmen!*

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[1] *derre*, dearer.
[2] *in little brede*, without display.
[3] *surë*, frank.

"We must give you a wage as one of the hands, Angus," says Queen T.

"I am paid already," says he. "I would work my passage through for the sketch of Canna that Miss Avon gave me."

"Would you like to ask the other men whether they would take the same payment?" says Miss Avon, in modest depreciation of her powers.

"Do not say anything against the landscape ye gave to Dr. Sutherland," observes the Laird. "No, no; there is great merit in it. I have told ye before I would like to show it to Tom Galbraith before it goes south; I am sure he would approve of it. Indeed, he is jist such a friend of mine that I would take the leeberty of asking him to give it a bit touch here and there—what an experienced artist would see amiss ye know——"

"Mr. Galbraith may be an experienced artist," says our Doctor friend with unnecessary asperity, "but he is not going to touch that picture."

"Ah can tell ye," says the Laird, who is rather hurt by this rejection, "that the advice of Tom Galbraith has been taken by the greatest artists in England. He was up in London last year, and was at the studio of one of the first of the Acadameecians, and that very man was not ashamed to ask the opeenion of Tom Galbraith. And says Tom to him, 'The face is very fine, but the right arm is out of drawing.' You would think that impertinent? The Acadameecian, I can tell you, thought differently. Says he, 'That has been my own opeenion, but no one would ever tell me so; and I would have left it as it is had ye no spoken.'"

"I have no doubt the Academician who did not know when his picture was out of drawing was quite right to take the advice of Tom Galbraith," says our stroke-oar. "But Tom Galbraith is not going to touch Miss Avon's sketch of Canna——" and here

the fierce altercation is stopped, for stroke-oar puts a fresh spurt on, and we hear another sound—

Soon the freshening breeze will blow,
We'll show the snowy canvas on her,
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Well, what was the result of our quest? After we had landed Master Fred, and sent him up the hills, and gone off fishing for lithe for an hour or so, we returned to the shore in the gathering dusk. We found our messenger seated on a rock, contentedly singing a Gaelic song, and plucking a couple of fowls, which was all the provender he had secured. It was in vain that he tried to cheer us by informing us that the animals in question had cost only sixpence a-piece. We knew that they were not much bigger than thrushes. Awful visions of tinned meats began to rise before us. In gloom we took the steward and the microscopic fowls on board, and set out for the yacht.

But the Laird did not lose his spirits. He declared that self-preservation was the first law of nature, and that, despite the injunctions of the Wild Birds' Protection Act, he would get out his gun and shoot the first brood of "flappers" he saw about those lonely lochs. And he told us such a "good one" about Homesh that we laughed nearly all the way back to the yacht. Provisions? We were independent of provisions! With a handful of rice a day we would cross the Atlantic—we would cross twenty Atlantics—so long as we were to be regaled and cheered by the "good ones" of our friend of Denny-mains.

Dr. Sutherland, too, seemed in no wise depressed by the famine in the land. In the lamp-lit saloon, as we gathered round the table, and cards and things were brought out, and the Laird began to brew his toddy, the young Doctor maintained that no one on

land could imagine the snugness of life on board a yacht. And now he had almost forgotten to speak of leaving us; perhaps it was the posting of the paper on Radiolarians, along with other MSS., that had set his mind free. But touching that matter of the Dunvegan post-office: why had he been so particular in asking Mary Avon if she were not expecting letters; and why did he so suddenly grow enthusiastic about the scenery on learning that the young lady, on her travels, was not pestered with correspondence? Miss Avon was not a Cabinet Minister.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD SCHOOL AND THE NEW.

THE last instructions given to John of Skye that night were large and liberal. At break of day he was to sail for any port he might chance to encounter on the wide seas. So long as Angus Sutherland did not speak of returning, what did it matter to us?—Loch Boisdale, Loch Seaforth, Stornaway, St. Kilda, the North Pole were all the same. It is true that of fresh meat we had on board only two fowls about the size of wrens; but of all varieties of tinned meats and fruit we had an abundant store. And if perchance we were forced to shoot a sheep on the Flannen Islands, would not the foul deed be put down to the discredit of those dastardly Frenchmen? When you rise up as a nation and guillotine all the respectable folk in the country, it is only to be expected of you thereafter that you should go about the seas shooting other people's sheep.

And indeed when we get on deck after breakfast, we find that John of Skye has fulfilled his instructions

to the letter; that is to say, he must have started at daybreak to get away so far from Dunvegan and the headlands of Skye. But as for going farther? There is not a speck of cloud in the dome of blue; there is not a ripple on the dazzling sea; there is not a breath of wind to stir the great white sails all aglow in the sunlight; nor is there even enough of the Atlantic swell to move the indolent tiller. How John of Skye has managed to bring us so far on so calm a morning remains a mystery.

"And the glass shows no signs of falling," says our young Doctor quite regretfully: does he long for a hurricane, that so he may exhibit his sailor-like capacities?

But Mary Avon, with a practical air, is arranging her easel on deck, and fixing up a canvas, and getting out the tubes she wants—the while she absently sings to herself something about

Beauty lies
In many eyes,
But love in yours, my Nora Creina.

And what will she attack now? Those long headlands of Skye, dark in shadow, with a glow of sunlight along their summits; or those lonely hills of Uist set far amid the melancholy main; or those vaster and paler mountains of Harris, that rise on the north of the dreaded Sound?

"Well, you *have* courage," says Angus Sutherland, admiringly, "to try to make a picture out of *that!*"

"Oh," she says, modestly, though she is obviously pleased, "that is a pet theory of mine. I try for ordinary every-day effects, without any theatrical business; and if I had only the power to reach them, I know I should surprise people. Because you know most people go through the world with a sort of mist before their eyes; and they are awfully grateful to you when you suddenly clap a pair of spectacles on

their nose and make them see things as they are. I cannot do it as yet, you know; but there is no harm in trying."

"I think you do it remarkably well," he says; "but what are you to make of that?—nothing but two great sheets of blue, with a line of bluer hills between?"

But Miss Avon speedily presents us with the desired pair of spectacles. Instead of the cloudless blue day we had imagined it to be, we find that there are low masses of white cloud along the Skye cliffs, and these throw long reflections on the glassy sea, and moreover we begin to perceive that the calm vault around us is not an uninterrupted blue, but melts into a pale green as it nears the eastern horizon. Angus Sutherland leaves the artist to her work. He will not interrupt her by idle talk.

There is no idle talk going forward where the Laird is concerned. He has got hold of an attentive listener in the person of his hostess, who is deep in needlework; and he is expounding to her more clearly than ever the merits of the great Semple case, pointing out more particularly how the charges in the major proposition are borne out by the extracts in the minor. Yes; and he has caught the critics, too, on the hip. What about the discovery of those clever gentlemen that Genesis X. and 10 was incorrect? They thought they were exceedingly smart in proving that the founders of Babel were the descendants, not of Ham, but of Shem. But when the ruins of Babel were examined, what then?

"Why, it was distinctly shown that the founders were the descendants of Ham, after all!" says Dennymains, triumphantly. "What do ye think of that, Dr. Sutherland?"

Angus Sutherland starts from a reverie: he has not been listening.

"Of what?" he says. "The Semple case?"

"Ay."

"Oh, well," he says, rather carelessly, "all that wrangling is as good an occupation as any other—to keep people from thinking."

The Laird stares, as if he had not heard aright. Angus Sutherland is not aware of having said anything startling. He continues quite innocently—

"Any occupation is valuable enough that diverts the mind—that is why hard work is conducive to complete mental health; it does not matter whether it is grouse-shooting, or commanding an army, or wrangling about major or minor propositions. If a man were continually to be facing the awful mystery of existence—asking the record of the earth and the stars how he came to be here, and getting no answer at all—he must inevitably go mad. The brain could not stand it. If the human race had not busied itself with wars and commerce, and so forth, it must centuries ago have committed suicide. That is the value of hard work—to keep people from thinking of the unknown around them; the more a man is occupied, the happier he is—it does not matter whether he occupies himself with School Boards, or salmon-fishing, or the prosecution of a heretic."

He did not remark the amazed look on the Laird's face, nor yet that Mary Avon had dropped her painting and was listening.

"The fact is," he said, with a smile, "if you are likely to fall to thinking about the real mysteries of existence anywhere, it is among solitudes like these, where you see what a trivial little accident human life is in the history of the earth. You can't think about such things in Regent Street; the cigar-shops, the cabs, the passing people occupy you. But here you are brought back as it were to all sorts of first principles; and commonplaces appear somehow in their original freshness. In Regent Street you no doubt know that life is a strange thing, and that death is a

strange thing, because you have been told so, and you believe it, and think no more about it. But here—with the seas and skies round you, and with the silence of the night making you think, you *feel* the strangeness of these things. Now just look over there; the blue sea, and the blue sky, and the hills—it is a curious thing to think that they will be shining there just as they are now—on just such another day as this—and you unable to see them or anything else—passed away like a ghost. And the *White Dove* will be sailing up here; and John will be keeping an eye on Ushinish lighthouse; but your eyes won't be able to see anything——"

"Well, Angus, I do declare," exclaims our sovereign mistress, "you *have* chosen a comforting thing to talk about this morning. Are we to be always thinking about our coffin?"

"On the contrary," says the young Doctor; "I was only insisting on the wholesomeness of people occupying themselves diligently with some distraction or other, however trivial. And how do you think the Semple case will end, sir?"

But our good friend of Denny-mains was far too deeply shocked and astounded to reply. The great Semple case a trivial thing—a distraction—an occupation to keep people from serious thinking! The public duties, too, of the Commissioner for the Burgh of Strathgovan; were these to be regarded as a mere plaything? The new steam fire-engine was only a toy, then? The proposed new park and the addition to the rates were to be regarded as a piece of amiable diversion?

The Laird knew that Angus Sutherland had not read the *Vestiges of Creation*, and that was a hopeful sign. But, *Vestiges* or no *Vestiges*, what were the young men of the day coming to if their daring speculations led them to regard the most serious and important concerns of life as a pastime? The Com-

missioners for the Burgh of Strathgovan were but a parcel of children, then, playing on the sea-shore, and unaware of the awful deeps beyond?

"I am looking at these things only as a doctor," says Dr. Sutherland, lightly—seeing that the Laird is too dumbfounded to answer his question, "and I sometimes think a doctor's history of civilisation would be an odd thing, if only you could get at the physiological facts of the case. I should like to know, for example, what Napoleon had for supper on the night before Waterloo. Something indigestible, you may be sure; if his brain had been clear on the 15th, he would have smashed the Allies, and altered modern history. I should have greatly liked, too, to make the acquaintance of the man who first announced his belief that infants dying unbaptised were to suffer eternal torture: I think it must have been his liver. I should like to have examined him."

"I should like to have poisoned him," says Mary Avon, with a flash of anger in the soft eyes.

"Oh, no; the poor wretch was only the victim of some ailment," said our Doctor, charitably. "There must have been something very much the matter with Calvin, too. I know I could have cured Schopenhauer of his pessimism if he had let me put him on a wholesome regimen."

The Laird probably did not know who Schopenhauer was; but the audacity of the new school was altogether too much for him.

"I—I suppose," he said, stammering in his amazement, "ye would have taken Joan of Arc, and treated her as a lunatic?"

"Oh, no; not as a confirmed lunatic," he answered, quite simply. "But the diagnosis of that case is obvious; I think she could have been cured. All that Joanna Southcote wanted was a frank physician."

The Laird rose and went forward to where Mary Avon was standing at her easel. He had had enough.

The criticism of landscape painting was more within his compass.

"Very good—very good," says he, as if his whole attention had been occupied by her sketching. "The reflections on the water are just fine. Ye must let me show all your sketches to Tom Galbraith before ye go back to the south."

"I hear you have been talking about the mysteries of existence," she says, with a smile.

"Oh, ay, it is easy to talk," he says sharply—and not willing to confess that he has been driven away from the field. "I am afraid there is an unsettling tendency among the young men of the present day—a want of respect for things that have been established by the common sense of the world. Not that I am against all innovation. No, no. The world cannot stand still. I myself, now; do ye know that I was among the first in Glasgow to hold that it might be permissible to have an organ to lead the psalmody of a church?"

"Oh, indeed," says she, with much respect.

"That is true. No, no; I am not one of the bigoted. Give me the Essentials, and I do not care if ye put a stone cross on the top of the church. I tell ye that honestly; I would not object even to a cross on the building if all was sound within."

"I am sure you are quite right, sir," says Mary Avon, gently.

"But no tampering with the Essentials. And as for the millinery, and incense, and crucifixes of they poor craytures that have not the courage to go right over to Rome—who stop on this side, and play-act at being Romans—it is seeckening—perfectly seeckening. As for the Romans themselves, I do not condemn them. No, no. If they are in error, I doubt not they believe with a good conscience. And when I am in a foreign town, and one o' their processions of priests and boys comes by, I raise my hat. I do indeed."

"Oh, naturally," says Mary Avon.

"No, no," continues Denny-mains, warmly, "there is none of the bigot about me. There is a minister of the Episcopalian Church that I know; and there is no one more welcome in my house: I ask him to say grace just as I would a minister of my own Church."

"And which is that, sir?" she asked meekly.

The Laird stares at her. Is it possible that she has heard him so elaborately expound the Semple prosecution, and not be aware to what denomination he belongs?

"The Free—the Free Church, of course," he says, with some surprise. "Have ye not seen the *Report of Proceedings* in the Semple case?"

"No, I have not," she answers, timidly. "You have been so kind in explaining it that—that a printed report was quite unnecessary."

"But I will get ye one—I will get ye one directly," says he. "I have several copies in my portmanteau. And ye will see my name in front as one of the elders who considered it fit and proper that a full report should be published, so as to warn the public against these inseedious attacks against our faith. Don't interrupt your work, my lass; but I will get ye the pamphlet; and whenever you want to sit down for a time, ye will find it most interesting reading—most interesting."

And so the worthy Laird goes below to fetch that valued report. And scarcely has he disappeared than a sudden commotion rages over the deck. Behold! a breeze coming swiftly over the sea—ruffling the glassy deep as it approaches! Angus Sutherland jumps to the tiller. The head-sails fill; and the boat begins to move. The lee-sheets are hauled taut; and now the great mainsail is filled too. There is a rippling and hissing of water; and a new stir of life and motion throughout the vessel from stem to stern.

It seems but the beginning of the day now, though

it is near lunch-time. Mary Avon puts away her sketch of the dead calm, and sits down just under the lee of the boom, where the cool breeze is blowing along. The Laird, having brought up the pamphlet, is vigorously pacing the deck for his morning exercise; we have all awakened from these idle reveries about the mystery of life.

"Ha, ha," he says, coming aft, "this is fine—this is fine now. Why not give the men a glass of whiskey all round for whistling up such a fine breeze? Do ye think they would object?"

"Better give them a couple of bottles of beer for their dinner," suggests Queen T., who is no lover of whiskey.

But do you think the Laird is to be put off his story by any such suggestion? We can see by his face that he has an anecdote to fire off; is it not apparent that his mention of whiskey was made with a purpose?

"There was a real good one," says he—and the laughter is already twinkling in his eyes, "about the man that was apologising before his family for having been drinking whiskey with some friends. 'Ay,' says he, 'they just held me and forced it down my throat.' Then says his son—a little chap about ten—says he, 'I think I could ha' held ye mysel' feyther,'—ho! ho! ho!' says he, I 'think I could ha' held ye mysel', feyther;'" and the Laird laughed, and laughed again, till the tears came into his eyes. We could see that he was still internally laughing at that good one when we went below for luncheon.

At luncheon, too, the Laird quite made up his feud with Angus Sutherland, for he had a great many other good ones to tell about whiskey and whiskey drinking; and he liked a sympathetic audience. But this general merriment was suddenly dashed by an ominous suggestion coming from our young Doctor. Why, he asked, should we go on fighting against these northerly winds? Why not turn and run before them?

"Then you want to leave us, Angus," said his hostess reproachfully.

"Oh, no," he said, and with some colour in his face. "I don't want to go, but I fear I must very soon now. However, I did not make that suggestion on my own account; if I were pressed for time, I could get somewhere where I could catch the *Clansman*."

Mary Avon looked down, saying nothing.

"You would not leave the ship like that," says his hostess. "You would not run away, surely? Rather than that we will turn at once. Where are we now?"

"If the breeze lasts, we will get over to Uist, to Loch na Maddy, this evening, but you must not think of altering your plans on my account. I made the suggestion because of what Captain John was saying."

"Very well," says our Admiral of the Fleet, taking no heed of properly constituted authority. "Suppose we set out on our return voyage to-morrow morning, going round the other side of Skye for a change. But you know, Angus, it is not fair of you to run away when you say yourself there is nothing particular calls you to London."

"Oh," says he, "I am not going to London just yet. I am going to Banff, to see my father. There is an uncle of mine, too, on a visit to the manse."

"Then you will be coming south again?"

"Yes."

"Then why not come another cruise with us on your way back?"

It was not like this hard-headed young Doctor to appear so embarrassed.

"That is what I should like very much myself," he stammered, "if—if I were not in the way of your other arrangements."

"We shall make no other arrangements," says the other definitely. "Now that is a promise, mind. No drawing back. Mary will put it down in writing, and hold you to it."

Mary Avon had not looked up all this time.

"You should not press Dr. Sutherland too much," she says shyly; "perhaps he has other friends he would like to see before leaving Scotland."

The hypocrite! Did she want to make Angus Sutherland burst a blood-vessel in protesting that of all the excursions he had made in his life this would be to him for ever the most memorable; and that a repetition or extension of it was a delight in the future almost too great to think of? However, she seemed pleased that he spoke so warmly, and she did not attempt to contradict him. If he had really enjoyed all this rambling idleness, it would no doubt the better fit him for his work in the great capital.

We beat in to Loch na Maddy—that is, the Lake of the Dogs—in the quiet evening; and the rather commonplace low-lying hills, and the plain houses of the remote little village, looked beautiful enough under the glow of the western skies. And we went ashore, and walked inland for a space, through an intricate net-work of lagoons inbranching from the sea; and we saw the trout leaping and making circles on the gold-red pools, and watched the herons rising from their fishing and winging their slow flight across the silent lakes.

And it was a beautiful night, too, and we had a little singing on deck. Perhaps there was an undercurrent of regret in the knowledge that now—for this voyage, at least—we had touched our farthest point. To-morrow we were to set out again for the south.

CHAPTER XIII.

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA.

THE wind was laughing at Angus Sutherland. All the time we had been sailing north it had blown from the north; now that we turned our faces eastward, it wheeled round to the east, as if it would imprison him for ever in this floating home.

"*You would fain get away*"—this was the mocking sound that one of us seemed to hear in those light airs of the morning that blew along the white canvas—"*the world calls; ambition, fame, the eagerness of rivalry, the spell that science throws over her disciples, all these are powerful, and they draw you, and you would fain get away. But the hand of the wind is uplifted against you; you may fret as you will, but you are not round Ru Hunish yet!*"

And perhaps the imaginative small creature who heard these strange things in the light breeze against which we were fighting our way across the Minch may have been forming her own plans. Angus Sutherland, she used often to say, wanted humanising. He was too proud and scornful in the pride of his knowledge; the gentle hand of a woman was needed to lead him into more tractable ways. And then this Mary Avon, with her dexterous, nimble woman's wit, and her indomitable courage, and her life and spirit, and abounding cheerfulness; would she not be a splendid companion for him during his long and hard struggle? This born match-maker had long ago thrown away any notion about the Laird transferring our singing-bird to Denny-mains. She had almost forgotten about the project of bringing Howard Smith, the Laird's nephew, and half-compelling him to marry Mary

Avon: that was preposterous on the face of it. But she had grown accustomed, during those long days of tranquil idleness, to see our young Doctor and Mary Avon together, cut off from all the distractions of the world, a new Paul and Virginia. Why—she may have asked herself—should not these two solitary waifs, thus thrown by chance together on the wide ocean of existence, why should they not cling to each other and strengthen each other in the coming days of trial and storm? The strange, pathetic, phantasmal farce of life is brief; they cannot seize it and hold it, and shape it to their own ends; they know not whence it comes, or whither it goes; but while the brief, strange thing lasts, they can grasp each other's hand, and make sure—amid all the unknown things around them, the mountains, and the wide seas, and the stars —of some common, humble, human sympathy. It is so natural to grasp the hand of another in the presence of something vast and unknown.

The rest of us, at all events, have no time for such vague dreams and reveries. There is no idleness on board the *White Dove* out here on the shining deep. Dr. Sutherland has rigged up for himself a sort of gymnasium by putting a rope across the shrouds to the peak halyards; and on this rather elastic cross-bar he is taking his morning exercise by going through a series of performances, no doubt picked up in Germany. Miss Avon is busy with a sketch of the long headland running out to Vaternish Point; though, indeed, this smooth Atlantic roll makes it difficult for her to keep her feet, and introduces a certain amount of haphazard into her handiwork. The Laird has brought on deck a formidable portfolio of papers, no doubt relating to the public affairs of Strathgovan; and has put on his gold spectacles; and has got his pencil in hand. Master Fred is re-arranging the cabins; the mistress of the yacht is looking after her flowers. And then is heard the voice of John of Skye

—"*Stand by, boys!*" and "*Bout ship!*" and the helm goes down, and the jib and foresail flutter and tear at the blocks and sheets, and then the sails gently fill, and the *White Dove* is away on another tack.

"Well, I give in," says Mary Avon, at last, as a heavier lurch than usual threatens to throw her and her easel together into the scuppers. "It *is* no use."

"I thought you never gave in, Mary," says our Admiral, whose head has appeared again at the top of the companion-stairs.

"I wonder who could paint like this," says Miss Avon, indignantly. And indeed she is trussed up like a fowl, with one arm round one of the gig davits.

"Turner was lashed to the mast of a vessel in order to see a storm," says Queen T.

"But not to paint," retorts the other. "Besides, I am not Turner. Besides, I am tired."

By this time, of course, Angus Sutherland has come to her help; and removes her easel and what not for her; and fetches her a deck-chair.

"Would you like to play chess?" says he.

"Oh, yes," she answers dutifully, "if you think the pieces will stay on the board."

"Draughts will be safer," says he, and therewith he plunges below, and fetches up the squared board.

And so, on this beautiful summer day, with the shining seas around them, and a cool breeze tempering the heat of the sun, Ferdinand and Miranda set to work. And it was a pretty sight to see them—her soft dark eyes so full of an anxious care to acquit herself well; his robust, hard, fresh-coloured face full of a sort of good-natured forbearance. But nevertheless it was a strange game. All Scotchmen are supposed to play draughts; and one brought up in a manse is almost of necessity a good player. But one astonished onlooker began to perceive that, whereas Mary Avon played but indifferently, her opponent played with a

blindness that was quite remarkable. She had a very pretty, small, white hand; was he looking at that that he did not, on one occasion, see how he could have taken three pieces and crowned his man all at one fell swoop? And then it is considered incumbent on a draught-player to inform his opponent of what would be a better move on the part of the latter? However that may be, true it is that, by dint of much advice, opportune blindness, and atrocious bad play, the Doctor managed to get the game ended in a draw.

"Dear me," said Mary Avon, "I never thought I should have had a chance. The Scotch are such good draught-players."

"But you play remarkably well," said he—and there was no blush of shame on his face.

Draughts and luncheon carry us on to the afternoon; and still the light breeze holds out; and we get nearer to the most northerly points of Skye. And as the evening draws on, we can now make out the hilly line of Ross-shire—a pale rose-colour in the far east; and nearer at hand is the Skye coast, with the warm sunlight touching on the ruins of Duntulme, where Donald Gorm Môr fed his imprisoned nephew on salt beef, and then lowered to him an empty cup—mocking him before he died; and then in the west the mountains of Harris, a dark purple against the clear lemon-golden glow. But as night draws on, behold! the wind dies away altogether; and we lie becalmed on a lilac-and-silver sea, with some rocky islands over there grown into a strange intense green in the clear twilight.

Down with the gig, then, John of Skye!—and hurry in all our rods, and lines, and the occult entrapping inventions of our patriarch of Denny-mains. We have no scruple about leaving the yacht in mid-ocean, in charge of the steward only. The clear twilight shines in the sky; there is not a ripple on the sea; only the long Atlantic swell that we can hear breaking far away on the rocks. And surely such

calms are infrequent in the Minch; and surely these lonely rocks can have been visited but seldom by passing voyagers?

Yet the great rollers—as we near the forbidding shores—break with an ominous thunder on the projecting points and reefs. The Doctor insists on getting closer and closer—he knows where the big lithe are likely to be found—and the men, although they keep a watchful eye about them, obey. And then—it is Mary Avon who first calls out—and behold! her rod is suddenly dragged down—the point is hauled below the water—agony and alarm are on her face.

"Here—take it—take it!" she calls out. "The rod will be broken."

"Not a bit," the Doctor calls out. "Give him the butt hard! Never mind the rod! Haul away!"

And indeed by this time everybody was alternately calling and hauling; and John of Skye, attending to the rods of the two ladies, had scarcely time to disengage the big fish, and smooth the flies again; and the Laird was declaring that these lithe fight as hard as a twenty-pound salmon. What did we care about those needles and points of black rock that every two or three seconds showed their teeth through the breaking white surf?

"Keep her close in, boys!" Angus Sutherland cried. "We shall have a fine pickling to-morrow."

Then one fish, stronger or bigger than his fellows, pulls the rod clean out of Mary Avon's hands.

"Well, I have done it this time," she says.

"Not a bit!" her companion cries. "Up all lines! Back now, lads—gently!"

And as the stern of the boat is shoved over the great glassy billows, behold! a thin dark line occasionally visible—the end of the lost rod! Then there is a swoop on the part of our Doctor; he has both his hands on the butt; there elapses a minute or two of fighting between man and fish; and then we can see

below the boat the wan gleam of the captured animal as it comes to the surface in slow circles. Hurrah! a seven-pounder! John of Skye chuckles to himself as he grasps the big lithe.

"Oh, ay!" he says, "the young leddy knows ferry well when to throw away the rod. It is a gran' good thing to throw away the rod when there will be a big fish. Ay, ay, it iss a good fish."

But the brutes that fought hardest of all were the dog-fish—the snakes of the sea; and there was a sort of holy Archangelic joy on the face of John of Skye when he seized a lump of stick to fell these hideous creatures before flinging them back into the water again. And yet why should they have been killed on account of their snake-like eyes and their cruel mouth? The human race did not rise and extirpate Frederick Smethurst because he was ill-favoured.

By half-past ten we had secured a good cargo of fish; and then we set out for the yacht. The clear twilight was still shining above the Harris hills; but there was a dusky shadow along the Outer Hebrides, where the orange ray of Scalpa light was shining; and there was dusk in the south, so that the yacht had become invisible altogether. It was a long pull back; for the *White Dove* had been carried far by the ebb tide. When we found her, she looked like a tall grey ghost in the gathering darkness; and no light had as yet been put up; but all the same we had a laughing welcome from Master Fred, who was glad to have the fresh fish wherewith to supplement our frugal meals.

Then the next morning—when we got up and looked around—we were in the same place! And the glass would not fall; and the blue skies kept blue; and we had to encounter still another day of dreamy idleness.

"The weather is conspiring against you, Angus," our sovereign lady said, with a smile. "And you know

you cannot run away from the yacht: it would be so cowardly to take the steamer."

"Well, indeed," said he, "it is the first time in my life that I have found absolute idleness enjoyable; and I am not so very anxious it should end. Somehow, though, I fear we are too well off. When we get back to the region of letters and telegrams, don't you think we shall have to pay for all this selfish happiness?"

"Then why should we go back?" she says lightly. "Why not make a compact to forsake the world altogether, and live all our life on board the *White Dove?*"

Somehow, his eyes wandered to Mary Avon; and he said—rather absently—

"I, for one, should like it well enough; if it were only possible."

"No, no," says the Laird, brusquely, "that will no do at all. It was never intended that people should go and live for themselves like that. Ye have your duties to the nation and to the laws that protect ye. When I left Denny-mains I told my brother Commissioners that what I could do when I was away to further the business of the Burgh I would do; and I have entered most minutely into several matters of great importance. And that is why I am anxious to get to Portree. I expect most important letters there."

Portree! Our whereabouts on the chart last night was marked between 45 and 46 fathoms W.S.W. from some nameless rocks; and here as far as we can make out, we are still between these mystical numbers. What can we do but chat, and read, and play draughts, and twirl round a rope, and ascend to the cross-trees to look out for a breeze, and watch and listen to the animal-life around us?

"I do think," says Mary Avon to her hostess, "the calling of those divers is the softest and most musical sound I ever heard; perhaps because it is asssociated with so many beautiful places. Just fancy, now, if

you were suddenly to hear a diver symphony beginning in an opera—if all the falsetto recitative and the blare of the trumpets were to stop—and if you were to hear the violins and flutes beginning, quite low and soft, a diver symphony, would you not think of the Hebrides, and the *White Dove*, and the long summer days? In the winter, you know, in London, I fancy we should go once or twice to see *that* opera!"

"I have never been to an opera," remarks the Laird, quite impervious to Mary Avon's tender enthusiasm. "I am told it is a fantastic exhibeetion."

One incident of that day was the appearance of a new monster of the deep, which approached quite close to the hull of the *White Dove*. Leaning over the rail we could see him clearly in the clear water—a beautiful, golden, submarine insect, with a conical body like that of a land-spider, and six or eight slender legs, by the incurving of which he slowly propelled himself through the water. As we were perfectly convinced that no one had ever been in such dead calms in the Minch before, and had lain for twenty-four hours in the neighbourhood of 45 and 46, we took it for granted that this was a new animal. In the temporary absence of our F.R.S., the Laird was bold enough to name it the *Arachne Mary-Avonensis;* but did not seek to capture it. It went on its golden way.

But we were not to linger for ever in these northern seas, surrounded by perpetual summer calms—however beautiful the prospect might be to a young man fallen away, for the moment, from his high ambitions. Whatever summons from the far world might be awaiting us at Portree was soon to be served upon us. In the afternoon a slight breeze sprung up that gently carried us away past Ru Hunish, and round by Eilean Trodda, and down by Altavaig. The grey-green basaltic cliffs of the Skye coast were now in shadow; but the strong sunlight beat on the grassy ledges above; and there was a distant roar of water along the rocks. This

other throbbing sound, too: surely that must be some steamer far away on the other side of Rona?

The sunset deepened. Darker and darker grew the shadows in the great mountains above us. We heard the sea along the solitary shores.

The stars came out in the twilight: they seemed clearest just over the black mountains. In the silence there was the sound of a water-fall somewhere—in among those dark cliffs. Then our side-lights were put up; and we sate on deck; and Mary Avon, nestling close to her friend, was persuaded to sing for her

Yestreen the Queen had four Maries

—just as if she had never heard the song before. The hours went by; Angus Sutherland was talking in a slow, earnest, desultory fashion; and surely he must have been conscious that one heart there at least was eagerly and silently listening to him. The dawn was near at hand when finally we consented to go below.

What time of the morning was it that we heard John of Skye call out "*Six or seven fathoms 'll do*"? We knew at least that we had got into harbour; and that the first golden glow of the daybreak was streaming through the skylights of the saloon. We had returned from the wilds to the claims and the cares of civilisation; if there was any message to us, for good or for evil, from the distant world we had left for so long, it was now waiting for us on shore.

CHAPTER XIV.

EVIL TIDINGS.

We had indeed returned to the world: the first thing we saw on entering the saloon in the morning was a number of letters—actual letters, that had come through a post-office—lying on the breakfast-table. We stared at these strange things. Our good Queen T. was the first to approach them. She took them up as if she expected they would bite her.

"Oh, Mary," she says, "there is not one for you—not one."

Angus Sutherland glanced quickly at the girl. But there was not the least trace of disappointment on her face. On the contrary, she said, with a cheerful indifference—

"So much the better. They only bother people."

But of course they had to be opened and read—even the bulky parcel from Strathgovan. The only bit of intelligence that came from that quarter was to the effect that Tom Galbraith had been jilted by his lady-love; but as the rumour, it appeared, was in circulation among the Glasgow artists, the Laird instantly and indignantly refused to believe it. Envy is the meanest of the passions; and we knew that the Glasgow artists could scarcely sleep in their beds at night for thinking of the great fame of Mr. Galbraith of Edinburgh. However, amid all these letters one of us stumbled upon one little item that certainly concerned us. It was a clipping from the advertisement column of a newspaper. It was inclosed, without word or comment, by a friend in London who knew that we were slightly acquainted, perforce, with Mr. Frederick Smethurst. And it appeared that that gen-

tleman, having got into difficulties with his creditors, had taken himself off, in a surreptitious and evil manner, insomuch that this newspaper clipping was nothing more nor less than a hue and cry after the fraudulent bankrupt. That letter and its startling inclosure were quickly whipped into the pocket of the lady to whom they had been sent.

By great good luck Mary Avon was the first to go on deck. She was anxious to see this new harbour into which we had got. And then, with considerable dismay on her face, our sovereign mistress showed us this ugly thing. She was much excited. It was so shameful of him to bring this disgrace on Mary Avon! What would the poor girl say? And this gentle lady would not for worlds have her told while she was with us—until at least we get back to some more definite channel of information. She was, indeed, greatly distressed.

But we had to order her to dismiss these idle troubles. We formed ourselves into a committee on the spot; and this committee unanimously, if somewhat prematurely, and recklessly, resolved—

First, that it was not of the slightest consequence to us or any human creature where Mr. Frederick Smethurst was, or what he might do with himself.

Secondly, that if Mr. Frederick Smethurst were to put a string and a stone round his neck and betake himself to the bottom of the sea, he would earn our gratitude and in some measure atone for his previous conduct.

Thirdly, that nothing at all about the matter should be said to Mary Avon: if the man had escaped, there might probably be an end of the whole business.

To these resolutions, carried swiftly and unanimously, Angus Sutherland added a sort of desultory rider, to the effect that moral or immoral qualities do sometimes reveal themselves in the face. He was also of opinion that spare persons were more easy of detection in this

manner. He gave an instance of a well-known character in London—a most promising ruffian who had run through the whole gamut of discreditable offences. Why was there no record of this brave career written in the man's face? Because nature had obliterated the lines in fat. When a man attains to the dimensions and appearance of a scrofulous toad swollen to the size of an ox, moral and mental traces get rubbed out. Therefore, contended our F.R.S., all persons who set out on a career of villany, and don't want to be found out, should eat fat-producing foods. Potatoes and sugar he especially mentioned as being calculated to conceal crime.

However, we had to banish Frederick Smethurst and his evil deeds from our minds; for the yacht from end to end was in a bustle of commotion about our going ashore; and as for us—why, we meant to run riot in all the wonders and delights of civilisation. Innumerable fowls, tons of potatoes and cabbage and lettuce, fresh butter, new loaves, new milk: there was no end to the visions that rose before the excited brain of our chief commissariat officer. And when the Laird, in the act of stepping, with much dignity, into the gig, expressed his firm conviction that somewhere or other we should stumble upon a Glasgow newspaper not more than a week old, so that he might show us the reports of the meetings of the Strathgovan Commissioners, we knew of no further luxury that the mind could desire.

And as we were being rowed ashore, we could not fail to be struck by the extraordinary abundance of life and business and activity in the world. Portree, with its wooded crags and white houses shining in the sun, seemed a large and populous city. The smooth waters of the bay were crowded with craft of every description; and the boats of the yachts were coming and going with so many people on board of them that we were quite stared out of countenance. And then,

when we landed, and walked up the quay, and ascended the hill into the town, we regarded the signs over the shop-doors with the same curiosity that regards the commonest features of a foreign street. There was a peculiarity about Portree, however, that is not met with in continental capitals. We felt that the ground swayed lightly under our feet. Perhaps these were the last oscillations of the great volcanic disturbance that shot the black Coolins into the sky.

Then the shops: such displays of beautiful things, in silk, and wool, and cunning wood-work; human ingenuity declaring itself in a thousand ways, and appealing to our purses. Our purses, to tell the truth, were gaping. A craving for purchase possessed us. But, after all, the Laird could not buy servant girls' scarves as a present for Mary Avon; and Angus Sutherland did not need a second waterproof coat; and though we reached the telegraph office, there would have been a certain monotony in spending innumerable shillings on unnecessary telegrams, even though we might be rejoicing in one of the highest conveniences of civilisation. The plain truth must be told. Our purchases were limited to some tobacco and a box or two of paper collars for the men; to one or two shilling novels; and a flask of eau-de-Cologne. We did not half avail ourselves of all the luxuries spread out so temptingly before us.

"Do you think the men will have the water on board yet?" Mary Avon says, as we walk back. "I do not at all like being on land. The sun scorches so, and the air is stifling."

"In my opeenion," says the Laird, "the authorities of Portree are deserving of great credit for having fixed up the apparatus to let boats get water on board at the quay. It was a public-spirited project—it was that. And I do not suppose that any one grumbles at having to pay a shilling for the privilege. It is a legeetimate tax. I am sure it would have been a long

time or we could have got such a thing at Strathgovan, if there was need for it there; ye would scarcely believe it, ma'am, what a spirit of opposition there is among some o' the Commissioners to any improvement, ye would not believe it."

"Indeed," she says, in innocent wonder; she quite sympathises with this public-spirited reformer.

"Ay, it's true. Mind ye, I am a Conservative myself; I will have nothing to do with Radicals and their Republics; no, no, but a wise Conservative knows how to march with the age. Take my own poseetion: for example, as soon as I saw that the steam fire-engine was a necessity, I withdrew my opposition at once. I am very thankful to you, ma'am, for having given me an opportunity of carefully considering the question. I will never forget our trip round Mull. Dear me! it is warm the day," added the Laird, as he raised his broad felt hat, and wiped his face with his voluminous silk handkerchief.

Here come two pedestrians—good-looking young lads of an obviously English type—and faultlessly equipped from head to heel. They look neither to the left nor right; on they go manfully through the dust, the sun scorching their faces; there must be a trifle of heat under these knapsacks. Well, we wish them fine weather and whole heels. It is not the way some of us would like to pass a holiday. For what is this that Miss Avon is singing lightly to herself as she walks carelessly on, occasionally pausing to look in at a shop—

And often have we seamen heard how men are killed or undone,
By overturns of carriages, and thieves, and fires in London.

Here she turns aside to caress a small terrier; but the animal, mistaking her intention, barks furiously, and retreats, growling and ferocious, into the shop. Miss Avon is not disturbed. She walks on, and completes her nautical ballad—all for her own benefit—

We've heard what risk all landsmen run, from noblemen to tailors,
So, Billy, let's thank Providence that you and I are sailors!

"What on earth is that, Mary?" her friend behind asks.

The girl stops with a surprised look, as if she had scarcely been listening to herself; then she says lightly:—

"Oh, don't you know the sailor's song—I forget what they call it:—

A strong sou-wester's blowing, Billy, can't you hear it roar now,
Lord help 'em, how I pities all unhappy folks on shore now.

"You have become a thorough sailor, Miss Avon," says Angus Sutherland, who has overheard the last quotation.

"I—I like it better—I am more interested," she says, timidly, "since you were so kind as to show me the working of the ship."

"Indeed," says he, "I wish you would take command of her, and order her present captain below. Don't you see how tired his eyes are becoming? He won't take his turn of sleep like the others; he has been scarcely off the deck night or day since we left Canna; and I find it is no use remonstrating with him. He is too anxious; and he fancies I am in a hurry to get back; and these continual calms prevent his getting on. Now the whole difficulty would be solved, if you let me go back by the steamer; then you could lie at Portree here for a night or two, and let him have some proper rest."

"I do believe, Angus," says his hostess, laughing in her gentle way, "that you threaten to leave us just to see how anxious we are to keep you."

"My position as ship's doctor," he retorts, "is compromised. If Captain John falls ill on my hands whom am I to blame but myself?"

"I am quite sure I can get him to go below," says Mary Avon, with decision—"quite sure of it. That

is, especially," she adds, rather shyly, "if you will take his place. I know he would place more dependence on you than on any of the men."

This is a very pretty compliment to pay to one who is rather proud of his nautical knowledge.

"Well," he says, laughing, "the responsibility must rest on you. Order him below, to-night, and see whether he obeys. If we don't get to a proper anchorage, we will manage to sail the yacht somehow among us—you being captain, Miss Avon."

"If I am captain," she says, lightly—though she turns away her head somewhat, "I shall forbid your deserting the ship."

"So long as you are captain, you need not fear that," he answers. Surely he could say no less.

But it was still John of Skye who was skipper when, on getting under way, we nearly met with a serious accident. Fresh water and all provisions having been got on board, we weighed anchor only to find the breeze die wholly down. Then the dingay was got out to tow the yacht away from the sheltered harbour; and our young Doctor, always anxious for hard work, must needs jump in to join in this service. But the little boat had been straining at the cable for scarcely five minutes when a squall of wind came over from the north-west and suddenly filled the sails. "Look out there, boys!" called Captain John, for we were running full down on the dingay. "Let go the rope! Let go!" he shouted: but they would not let go, as the dingay came sweeping by. In fact she caught the yacht just below the quarter, and seemed to disappear altogether. Mary Avon uttered one brief cry; and then stood pale—clasping one of the ropes—not daring to look. And John of Skye uttered some exclamation in the Gaelic; and jumped on to the taffrail. But the next thing we saw, just above the taffrail, was the red and shining and laughing face of Angus Sutherland, who was hoisting himself up by means of the mizen

boom; and directly afterwards appeared the scarlet cap of Hector of Moidart. It was upon this latter culprit that the full force of John of Skye's wrath was expended.

"Why did you not let go the rope when I wass call to you?"

"It is all right, and if I wass put into the water, I have been in the water before," was the philosophic reply.

And now it was, as we drew away from Portree, that Captain Mary Avon endeavoured to assume supreme command and would have the deposed skipper go below and sleep. John of Skye was very obedient, but he said:—"Oh, ay. I will get plenty of sleep. But that hill there, that is Ben Inivaig; and there is not any hill in the West Highlands so bad for squalls as that hill. By and by I will get plenty of sleep."

Ben Inivaig let us go past its great, gloomy, forbidding shoulder and cliffs without visiting us with anything worse than a few variable puffs; and we got well down into the Raasay Narrows. What a picture of still summer loveliness was around us!—the rippling blue seas, the green shores, and far over these the black peaks of the Coolins now taking a purple tint in the glow of the afternoon. The shallow Sound of Scalpa we did not venture to attack, especially as it was now low water; we went outside Scalpa, by the rocks of Skier Dearg. And still John of Skye evaded, with a gentle Highland courtesy, the orders of the captain. The silver bell of Master Fred summoned us below for dinner, and still John of Skye was gently obdurate.

"Now, John," says Mary Avon, seriously, to him, "you want to make me angry."

"Oh, no, mem; I not think that," says he, deprecatingly.

"Then why won't you go and have some sleep? Do you want to be ill?"

"Oh, there iss plenty of sleep," says he. "Maybe we will get to Kyle Akin to-night; and there will be plenty of sleep for us."

"But I am asking you as a favour to go and get some sleep *now*. Surely the men can take charge of the yacht!"

"Oh, yes, oh, yes!" says John of Skye. "They can do that ferry well."

And then he paused—for he was great friends with this young lady, and did not like to disoblige her.

"You will be having your dinner now. After the dinner, if Mr. Sutherland himself will be on deck, I will go below and turn in for a time."

"Of course Dr. Sutherland will be on deck," says the new captain, promptly; and she was so sure of one member of her crew that she added, "and he will not leave the tiller for a moment until you come to relieve him."

Perhaps it was this promise—perhaps it was the wonderful beauty of the evening—that made us hurry over dinner. Then we went on deck again; and our young Doctor, having got all his bearings and directions clear in his head, took the tiller, and John of Skye at length succumbed to the authority of Commander Avon and disappeared into the forecastle.

The splendour of colour around us on that still evening!—away in the west the sea of a pale yellow green, with each ripple a flash of rose-flame, and over there in the south the great mountains of Skye—the Coolins, Blaven, and Ben-na-Cailleach—become of a plum-purple in the clear and cloudless sky. Angus Sutherland was at the tiller contemplatively smoking an almost black meerschaum; the Laird was discoursing to us about the extraordinary pith and conciseness of the Scotch phrases in the Northumbrian Psalter; while ever and anon a certain young lady, linked arm-in-arm with her friend, would break the silence with some aimless fragment of ballad or old-world air.

And still we glided onwards in the beautiful evening; and now ahead of us in the dusk of the evening, the red star of Kyle Akin lighthouse steadily gleamed. We might get to anchor, after all, without awaking John of Skye.

"In weather like this," remarked our sovereign lady, "in the gathering darkness, John might keep asleep for fifty years."

"Like Rip Van Winkle," said the Laird, proud of his erudition. "That is a wonderful story that Washington Irving wrote—a verra fine story."

"Washington Irving!—the story is as old as the Coolins," says Dr. Sutherland.

The Laird stared as if he had been Rip Van Winkle himself: was he for ever to be checkmated by the encyclopædic knowledge of Young England—or Young Scotland rather—and that knowledge only the gatherings and sweepings of musty books that anybody with a parrot-like habit might acquire?

"Why, surely you know that the legend belongs to that common stock of legends that go through all literatures?" says our young Doctor. "I have no doubt the Hindoos have their Epimenides; and that Peter Klaus turns up somewhere or other in the Gaelic stories. However, that is of little importance; it is of importance that Captain John should get some sleep. Hector, come here!"

There was a brief consultation about the length of anchor-chain wanted for the little harbour opposite Kyle Akin; Hector's instructions were on no account to disturb John of Skye. But no sooner had they set about getting the chain on deck than another figure appeared, black among the rigging; and there was a well-known voice heard forward. Then Captain John came aft, and, despite all remonstrances, would relieve his substitute. Rip Van Winkle's sleep had lasted about an hour and a half.

And now we steal by the black shores; and that

solitary red star comes nearer and nearer in the dusk; and at length we can make out two or three other paler lights close down by the water. Behold! the yellow ports of a steam-yacht at anchor; we know, as our own anchor goes rattling out in the dark, that we shall have at least one neighbour and companion through the still watches of the night.

CHAPTER XV.

TEMPTATION.

But the night, according to John of Skye's chronology, lasts only until the tide turns or until a breeze springs up. Long before the wan glare in the east has arisen to touch the highest peaks of the Coolins, we hear the tread of the men on deck getting the yacht under way. And then there is a shuffling noise in Angus Sutherland's cabin; and we guess that he is stealthily dressing in the dark. Is he anxious to behold the wonders of daybreak in the beautiful Loch Alsh, or is he bound to take his share in the sailing of the ship? Less perturbed spirits sink back again into sleep, and contentedly let the *White Dove* go on her own way through the expanding blue-grey light of the dawn.

Hours afterwards there is a strident shouting down the companion-way; everybody is summoned on deck to watch the yacht shoot the Narrows of Kyle Rhea. And the Laird is the first to express his surprise: are these the dreaded Narrows that have caused Captain John to start before daybreak so as to shoot them with the tide? All around is a dream of summer beauty and quiet. A more perfect picture of peace and loveliness could not be imagined than the green crags of

the mainland, and the vast hills of Skye, and this placid channel between shining in the fair light of the morning. The only thing we notice is that on the glassy green of the water—this reflected, deep, almost opaque green is not unlike the colour of Niagara below the Falls—there are smooth circular lines here and there; and now and again the bows of the *White Dove* slowly swerve away from her course as if in obedience to some unseen and mysterious pressure. There is not a breath of wind; and it needs all the pulling of the two men out there in the dingay and all the watchful steering of Captain John to keep her head straight. Then a light breeze comes along the great gully; the red-capped men are summoned on board; the dingay is left astern; the danger of being caught in an eddy and swirled ashore is over and gone.

Suddenly the yacht stops as if she had run against a wall. Then, just as she recovers, there is an extraordinary hissing and roaring in the dead silence around us, and close by the yacht we find a great circle of boiling and foaming water, forced up from below and overlapping itself in ever-increasing folds. And then, on the perfectly glassy sea, another and another of those boiling and hissing circles appears, until there is a low rumbling in the summer air like the breaking of distant waves. And the yacht—the wind having again died down—is curiously compelled one way and then another, insomuch that John of Skye quickly orders the men out in the dingay again; and once more the long cable is tugging at her bows.

"It seems to me," says Dr. Sutherland to our skipper, "that we are in the middle of about a thousand whirlpools."

"Oh, it iss ferry quate this morning," says Captain John, with a shrewd smile. "It iss not often so quate as this. Ay, it iss sometimes ferry bad here—quite so bad as Corrievreckan; and when the flood-tide is rinnin, it will be rinnin like—shist like a race-horse."

However, by dint of much hard pulling, and judicious steering, we manage to keep the *White Dove* pretty well in mid-current; and only once—and that but for a second or two—get caught in one of those eddies circling in to the shore. We pass the white ferry-house; a slight breeze carries us by the green shores and woods of Glenelg; we open out the wider sea between Isle Ornsay and Loch Hourn; and then a silver tinkle tells us breakfast is ready.

That long, beautiful, calm summer day: Ferdinand and Miranda playing draughts on deck—he having rigged up an umbrella to shelter her from the hot sun; the Laird busy with papers referring to the Strathgovan Public Park; the hostess of these people overhauling the stores and meditating on something recondite for dinner. At last the Doctor fairly burst out a-laughing.

"Well," said he, "I have been in many a yacht; but never yet in one where everybody on board was anxiously waiting for the glass to fall."

His hostess laughed too.

"When you come south again," she said, "we may be able to give you a touch of something different. I think that, even with all your love of gales, a few days of the equinoctials would quite satisfy you."

"The equinoctials!" he said, with a surprised look.

"Yes," said she boldly. "Why not have a good holiday while you are about it? And a yachting trip is nothing without a fight with the equinoctials. Oh, you have no idea how splendidly the *White Dove* behaves!"

"I should like to try her," he said, with a quick delight; but directly afterwards he ruefully shook his head. "No, no," said he, "such a tremendous spell of idleness is not for me. I have not earned the right to it yet. Twenty years hence I may be able to have three months' continued yatching in the West Highlands."

"If I were you," retorted this small person, with a practical air, "I would take it when I could get it. What do you know about twenty years hence?—you may be physician to the Emperor of China. And you have worked very hard; and you ought to take as long a holiday as you can get."

"I am sure," says Mary Avon very timidly, "that is very wise advice."

"In the mean time," says he, cheerfully, "I am not physician to the Emperor of China, but to the passengers and crew of the *White Dove*. The passengers don't do me the honour of consulting me; but I am going to prescribe for the crew on my own responsibility. All I want is, that I shall have the assistance of Miss Avon in making them take the dose."

Miss Avon looked up inquiringly with those soft black eyes of hers.

"Nobody has any control over them but herself—they are like refractory children. Now," said he, rather more seriously, "this night-and-day work is telling on the men. Another week of it and you would see *Insomnia* written in large letters on their eyes. I want you, Miss Avon, to get Captain John and the men to have a complete night's rest to-night—a sound night's sleep from the time we finish dinner till daybreak. We can take charge of the yacht."

Miss Avon promptly rose to her feet.

"John!" she called.

The big brown-bearded skipper from Skye came aft—putting his pipe in his waistcoat-pocket the while.

"John," she said, "I want you to do me a favour now. You and the men have not been having enough sleep lately. You must all go below to-night as soon as we come up from dinner; and you must have a good sleep till daybreak. The gentlemen will take charge of the yacht."

It was in vain that John of Skye protested he was

not tired. It was in vain that he assured her that, if a good breeze sprung up, we might get right back to Castle Osprey by the next morning.

"Why, you know very well," she said, "this calm weather means to last for ever."

"Oh, no! I not think that, mem," said John of Skye, smiling.

"At all events we shall be sailing all night; and that is what I want you to do, as a favour to me."

Indeed our skipper found it was of no use to refuse. The young lady was peremptory. And so, having settled that matter, she sate down to her draught-board again.

But it was the Laird she was playing with now. And this was a remarkable circumstance about the game: when Angus Sutherland played with Denny-mains, the latter was hopelessly and invariably beaten; and when Denny-mains in his turn played with Mary Avon, he was relentlessly and triumphantly the victor; but when Angus Sutherland played with Miss Avon, she, somehow or other, generally managed to secure two out of three games. It was a puzzling triangular duel: the chief feature of it was the splendid joy of the Laird when he had conquered the English young lady. He rubbed his hands, he chuckled, he laughed —just as if he had been repeating one of his own "good ones."

However, at luncheon the Laird was much more serious; for he was showing to us how remiss the Government was in not taking up the great solan question. He had a newspaper cutting which gave in figures —in rows of figures—the probable number of millions of herrings destroyed every year by the solan-geese. The injuries done to the herring-fisheries of this country, he proved to us, was enormous. If a solan is known to eat on an average fifty herrings a day, just think of the millions on millions of fish that must go to feed those nests on the Bass Rock! The Laird waxed

quite eloquent about it. The human race were dearer to him far than any gannet or family of gannets.

"What I wonder at is this," said our young Doctor with a curious grim smile, that we had learned to know, coming over his face, "that the solan, with that extraordinary supply of phosphorus to the brain, should have gone on remaining only a bird, and a very ordinary bird, too. Its brain-power should have been developed; it should be able to speak by this time. In fact, there ought to be solan school-boards and parochial boards on the Bass Rock; and commissioners appointed to inquire whether the building of nests might not be conducted on more scientific principles. When I was a boy—I am sorry to say—I used often to catch a solan by floating out a piece of wood with a dead herring on it: a wise bird, with its brain full of phosphorus, ought to have known that it would break its head when it swooped down on a piece of wood."

The Laird sate in dignified silence. There was something occult and uncanny about many of this young man's sayings—they savoured too much of the dangerous and unsettling tendencies of these modern days. Besides, he did not see what good could come of likening a lot of solan-geese to the Commissioners of the Burgh of Strathgovan. His remarks on the herring-fisheries had been practical and intelligible; they had given no occasion for jibes.

We were suddenly startled by the rattling out of the anchor-chain. What could it mean?—were we caught in an eddy? There was a scurrying up on deck, only to find that, having drifted so far south with the tide, and the tide beginning to turn, John of Skye proposed to secure what advantage we had gained by coming to anchor. There was a sort of shamed laughter over this business. Was the noble *White Dove* only a river barge, then, that she was thus dependent on the tides for her progress? But it was no use either to laugh or to

grumble; two of us proposed to row the Laird away to certain distant islands that lie off the shore north of the mouth of Loch Hourn; and for amusement's sake we took some towels with us.

Look now how this long and shapely gig cuts the blue water. The Laird is very dignified in the stern with the tiller-ropes in his hand; he keeps a straight course enough—though he is mostly looking over the side. And, indeed, this is a perfect wonder-hall over which we are making our way—the water so clear that we notice the fish darting here and there among the great brown blades of the tangle and the long green sea-grass. Then there are stretches of yellow sand, with shells and star-fish shining far below. The sun burns on our hands; there is a dead stillness of heat; the measured splash of the oars startles the sea-birds in there among the rocks.

Send the biorlinn on careering,
Cheerily and all together,
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Look out for the shallows, most dignified of coxswains: what if we were to imbed her bows in the silver sand?—

Another cheer! Our isle appears—
Our biorlinn bears her on the faster!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!

"Hold hard!" calls Denny-mains; and behold! we are in among a network of channels and small islands lying out here in the calm sea; and the birds are wildly calling and screaming and swooping about our heads, indignant at the approach of strangers. What is our first duty, then, in coming to these unknown islands and straits?—why, surely, to name

them in the interests of civilisation. And we do so accordingly. Here—let it be for ever known—is John Smith Bay. There, Thorley's Food for Cattle Island. Beyond that, on the south, Brown and Polson's Straits. It is quite true that these islands and bays may have been previously visited; but it was no doubt a long time ago; and the people did not stop to bestow names. The latitude and longitude may be dealt with afterwards; meanwhile the discoverers unanimously resolve that the most beautiful of all the islands shall hereafter, through all time, be known as the Island of Mary Avon.

It was on this island that the Laird achieved his memorable capture of a young sea-bird—a huge creature of unknown species that fluttered and scrambled over bush and over scaur, while Denny-mains, quite forgetting his dignity and the heat of the sun, clambered after it over the rocks. And when he got it in his hands, it lay as one dead. He was sorry. He regarded the newly-fledged thing with compassion; and laid it tenderly down on the grass; and came away down again to the shore. But he had scarcely turned his back when the demon bird got on its legs, and—with a succession of shrill and sarcastic "yawps" —was off and away over the higher ledges. No fasting girl had ever shammed so completely as this scarcely-fledged bird.

We bathed in Brown and Polson's Straits, to the great distress of certain sea-pyots that kept screaming over our heads, resenting the intrusion of the discoverers. But in the midst of it, we were suddenly called to observe a strange darkness on the sea, far away in the north, between Glenelg and Skye. Behold! the long-looked-for wind—a hurricane swooping down from the northern hills! Our toilette on the hot rocks was of brief duration; we jumped into the gig; away we went through the glassy water! It was a race between us and the northerly breeze which

should reach the yacht first; and we could see that John of Skye had remarked the coming wind, for the men were hoisting the fore-staysail. The dark blue on the water spreads; the reflections of the hills and the clouds gradually disappear; as we clamber on board the first puffs of the breeze are touching the great sails. The anchor has just been got up; the gig is hoisted to the davits; slack out the main sheet, you shifty Hector, and let the great boom go out! Nor is it any mere squall that has come down from the hills; but a fine, steady, northerly breeze; and away we go with the white foam in our wake. Farewell to the great mountains over the gloomy Loch Hourn; and to the lighthouse over there at Isle Ornsay; and to the giant shoulders of Ard-na-Glishnich. Are not these the dark green woods of Armadale that we see in the west? And southward, and still southward we go with the running seas and the fresh brisk breeze from the north: who knows where we may not be to-night before Angus Sutherland's watch begins?

There is but one thoughtful face on board. It is that of Mary Avon. For the moment, at least, she seems scarcely to rejoice that we have at last got this grateful wind to bear us away to the south and to Castle Osprey.

CHAPTER XVI.

THROUGH THE DARK.

Ahead she goes! the land she knows!

WHAT though we see a sudden squall come tearing over from the shores of Skye, whitening the waves as it approaches us? The *White Dove* is not afraid of any squall. And there are the green woods of Arma-

dale, dusky under the western glow; and here the sombre heights of Dun Bane; and soon we will open out the great gap of Loch Nevis. We are running with the running waves; a general excitement prevails; even the Laird has dismissed for the moment certain dark suspicions about Frederick Smethurst that have for the last day or two been haunting his mind.

And here is a fine sight!—the great steamer coming down from the north—and the sunset is burning on her red funnels—and behold! she has a line of flags from her stem to her topmasts and down to her stern again. Who is on board?—some great laird, or some gay wedding-party?

"Now is your chance, Angus," says Queen T., almost maliciously, as the steamer slowly gains on us. "If you want to go on at once, I know the captain would stop for a minute and pick you up."

He looked at her for a second in a quick, hurt way; then he saw that she was only laughing at him.

"Oh, no, thank you," he said, blushing like a schoolboy; "unless you want to get rid of me. I have been looking forward to sailing the yacht to-night."

"And—and you said," remarked Miss Avon, rather timidly, "that we should challenge them again after dinner this evening."

This was a pretty combination: "we" referred to Angus Sutherland and herself. Her elders were disrespectfully described as "them." So the younger people had not forgotten how they were beaten by "them" on the previous evening.

Is there a sound of pipes amid the throbbing of the paddles? What a crowd of people swarm to the side of the great vessel! And there is the captain on the paddle-box—out all handkerchiefs to return the innumerable salutations—and good-bye, you brave Glencoe!—you have no need to rob us of any one of our passengers.

Where does the breeze come from on this still evening?—there is not a cloud in the sky, and there is a drowsy haze of heat all along the land. But nevertheless it continues; and, as the *White Dove* cleaves her way through the tumbling sea, we gradually draw on to the Point of Sleat, and open out the great plain of the Atlantic, now a golden green, where the tops of the waves catch the light of the sunset skies. And there, too, are our old friends Haleval and Haskeval; but they are so far away, and set amid such a bewildering light, that the whole island seems to be of a pale transparent rose-purple. And a still stranger thing now attracts the eyes of all on board. The setting sun, as it nears the horizon-line of the sea, appears to be assuming a distinctly oblong shape. It is slowly sinking into a purple haze, and becomes more and more oblong as it nears the sea. There is a call for all the glasses hung up in the companion-way; and now what is it that we find out there by the aid of the various binoculars? Why, apparently, a wall of purple; and there is an oblong hole in it, with a fire of gold light far away on the other side. This apparent golden tunnel through the haze grows redder and more red; it becomes more and more elongated; then it burns a deeper crimson until it is almost a line. The next moment there is a sort of shock to the eyes; for there is a sudden darkness all along the horizon-line: the purple-black Atlantic is barred against that lurid haze low down in the west.

It was a merry enough dinner-party: perhaps it was the consciousness that the *White Dove* was still bowling along that brightened up our spirits, and made the Laird of Denny-mains more particularly loquacious. The number of good ones that he told us was quite remarkable—until his laughter might have been heard through the whole ship. And to whom now did he devote the narration of those merry anecdotes—to whom but Miss Mary Avon, who was his ready chorus

on all occasions, and who entered with a greater zest than any one into the humours of them. Had she been studying the Lowland dialect, then, that she understood and laughed so lightly and joyously at stories about a thousand years of age?

"Oh, ay," the Laird was saying patronisingly to her, "I see ye can enter into the peculiar humour of our Scotch stories; it is not every English person that can do that. And ye understand the language fine. . . . Well," he added, with an air of modest apology, "perhaps I do not give the pronunciation as broad as I might. I have got out of the way of talking the provincial Scotch since I was a boy—indeed, ah'm generally taken for an Englishman maself—but I do my best to give ye the speerit of it."

"Oh, I am sure your imitation of the provincial Scotch is most excellent—most excellent—and it adds so much to the humour of the stories," says this disgraceful young hypocrite.

"Oh, ay, oh, ay," says the Laird, greatly delighted. "I will admit that some o' the stories would not have so much humour but for the language. But when ye have both! Did ye ever hear of the laddie who was called in to his porridge by his mother?"

We perceived by the twinkle in the Laird's eyes that a real good one was coming. He looked round to see that we were listening, but it was Mary Avon whom he addressed.

"A grumbling bit laddie—a philosopher, too," said he. "His mother thought he would come in the quicker if he knew there was a fly in the milk. '*Johnny,*' she cried out, '*Johnny, come in to your parritch; there's a flee in the milk.*' '*It'll no droon,*' says he. '*What!*' she says, '*grumblin again? Do ye think there's no enough milk?*' '*Plenty for the parritch,*' says he—*kee! kee! kee!*—sharp, eh, wasn't he?—'*Plenty for the parritch,*' says he—ha! ha! ho! ho! ho!"—and the Laird slapped his thigh, and chuckled to himself.

"Oh, ay, Miss Mary," he added, approvingly, "I see you are beginning to understand the Scotch humour fine."

And if our good friend the Laird had been but twenty years younger—with his battery of irresistible jokes, and his great and obvious affection for this stray guest of ours, to say nothing of his dignity and importance as a Commissioner of Strathgovan? What chance would a poor Scotch student have had, with his test-tubes and his scientific magazines, his restless, audacious speculations and eager ambitions? On the one side, wealth, ease, a pleasant facetiousness, and a comfortable acceptance of the obvious facts of the universe—including water-rates and steam fire-engines; on the other, poverty, unrest, the physical struggle for existence, the mental struggle with the mysteries of life: who could doubt what the choice would be? However, there was no thought of this rivalry now. The Laird had abdicated in favour of his nephew, Howard, about whom he had been speaking a good deal to Mary Avon of late. And Angus—though he was always very kind and timidly attentive to Miss Avon—seemed nevertheless at times almost a little afraid of her; or perhaps it was only a vein of shyness that cropped up from time to time through his hard mental characteristics. In any case, he was at this moment neither the shy lover nor the eager student; he was full of the prospect of having sole command of the ship during a long night on the Atlantic, and he hurried us up on deck after dinner without a word about that return-battle at bézique.

The night had come on apace, though there was still a ruddy mist about the northern skies, behind the dusky purple of the Coolin hills. The stars were out overhead; the air around us was full of the soft cries of the divers; occasionally, amid the lapping of the water we could hear some whirring by of wings. Then the red port light and the green starboard light were

brought up from the forecastle, and fixed in their place; the men went below; Angus Sutherland took the tiller; the Laird kept walking backwards and forwards as a sort of look-out; and the two women were as usual seated on rugs together in some invisible corner—crooning snatches of ballads, or making impertinent remarks about people much wiser and older than themselves.

"Now, Angus," says the voice of one of them—apparently from somewhere about the companion, "show us that you can sail the yacht properly, and we will give you complete command during the equinoctials."

"You speak of the equinoctials," said he, laughing, "as if it was quite settled I should be here in September."

"Why not?" said she, promptly. "Mary is my witness you promised. You wouldn't go and desert two poor lone women?"

"But I have got that most uncomfortable thing, a conscience," he answered; "and I know it would stare at me as if I were mad if I proposed to spend such a long time in idleness. It would be outraging all my theories, besides. You know, for years and years back I have been limiting myself in every way—living, for example, on the smallest allowance of food and drink, and that of the simplest and cheapest—so that if any need arose, I should have no luxurious habits to abandon——"

"But what possible need can there be?" said Mary Avon, warmly.

"Do you expect to spend your life in a jail?" said the other woman.

"No," said he, quite simply. "But I will give you an instance of what a man who devotes himself to his profession may have to do. A friend of mine, who is one of the highest living authorities on *Materia Medica*, refused all invitations for three months, and during the whole of that time lived each day on precisely the

same food and drink, weighed out in exact quantities, so as to determine the effect of particular drugs on himself. Well, you know, you should be ready to do that——"

"Oh, how wrong you are!" says Mary Avon, with the same impetuosity. "A man who works as hard as you do should not sacrifice yourself to a theory. And what is it? It is quite foolish!"

"Mary!" her friend says.

"It is," she says, with generous warmth. "It is like a man who goes through life with a coffin on his back, so that he may be ready for death. Don't you think that when death comes it will be time enough to be getting the coffin?"

This was a poser.

"You know quite well," she says, "that when the real occasion offered, like the one you describe, you could deny yourself any luxuries readily enough; why should you do so now?"

At this there was a gentle sound of laughter.

"Luxuries—the luxuries of the *White Dove!*" says her hostess, mindful of tinned meats.

"Yes indeed," says our young Doctor, though he is laughing too. "There is far too much luxury—the luxury of idleness—on board this yacht to be wholesome for one like me."

"Perhaps you object to the effeminacy of the downy couches and the feather pillows," says his hostess, who is always grumbling about the hardness of the beds.

But it appears that she has made an exceedingly bad shot. The man at the wheel—one can just make out his dark figure against the clear starlit heavens, though occasionally he gets before the yellow light of the binnacle—proceeds to assure her that, of all the luxuries of civilisation, he appreciates most a horse-hair pillow; and that he attributes his sound sleeping on board the yacht to the hardness of the beds. He would rather lay his head on a brick, he

says, for a night's rest than sink it in the softest feathers.

"Do you wonder," he says, "that Jacob dreamed of angels when he had a stone for his pillow? I don't. If I wanted to have a pleasant sleep and fine dreams that is the sort of pillow I should have."

Some phrase of this catches the ear of our look-out forward; he instantly comes aft.

"Yes, it is a singular piece of testimony," he says. "There is no doubt of it; I have myself seen the very place."

We were not startled; we knew that the Laird, under the guidance of a well-known Free Church minister, had made a run through Palestine.

"Ay," said he, "the further I went away from my own country the more I saw nothing but decadence and meesery. The poor craytures!—living among ruins, and tombs, and decay, without a trace of public spirit or private energy. The disregard of sanitary laws was something terrible to look at—as bad as their universal beggary. That is what comes of centralisation, of suppressing local government. Would ye believe that there are a lot of silly bodies actually working to get our Burgh of Strathgovan annexed to Glasgow—swallowed up in Glasgow!"

"Impossible!" we exclaim.

"I tell ye it is true. But no, no! We are not ripe yet for those Radical measures. We are constituted under an Act of Parliament. Before the House of Commons would dare to annex the free and flourishing Burgh of Strathgovan to Glasgow, I'm thinking the country far and near would hear something of it!"

Yes; and we think so, too. And we think it would be better if the hamlets and towns of Palestine were governed by men of public spirit like the commissioners of Strathgovan; then they would be properly looked after. Is there a single steam fire-engine in Jericho?

However, it is late; and presently the women say

good-night and retire. And the Laird is persuaded to go below with them also; for how otherwise could he have his final glass of toddy in the saloon? There are but two of us left on deck, in the darkness, under the stars.

It is a beautiful night, with those white and quivering points overhead, and the other white and burning points gleaming on the black waves that whirl by the yacht. Beyond the heaving plain of waters there is nothing visible but the dusky gloom of the Island of Eigg, and away in the south the golden eye of Ardnamurchan lighthouse, for which we are steering. Then the intense silence—broken only when the wind, changing a little, gybes the sails and sends the great boom swinging over on to the lee tackle. It is so still that we are startled by the sudden noise of the blowing of a whale; and it sounds quite close to the yacht, though it is more likely that the animal is miles away.

"She is a wonderful creature—she is indeed," says the man at the wheel; as if every one must necessarily be thinking about the same person.

"Who?"

"Your young English friend. Every minute of her life seems to be an enjoyment to her; she sings just as a bird sings, for her own amusement, and without thinking."

"She can think, too; she is not a fool."

"Though she does not look very strong," continues the young Doctor, "she must have a thoroughly healthy constitution, or how could she have such a happy disposition? She is always contented; she is never put out. If you had only seen her patience and cheerfulness when she was attending that old woman—many a time I regretted it—the case was hopeless—a hired nurse would have done as well."

"Hiring a nurse might not have satisfied the young lady's notions of duty."

"Well, I've seen women in sick-rooms, but never any one like her," said he, and then he added, with a sort of emphatic wonder, "I'm hanged if she did not seem to enjoy that, too! Then you never saw any one so particular about following out instructions."

It is here suggested to our steersman that he himself may be a little too particular about following out instructions. For John of Skye's last counsel was to keep Ardnamurchan light on our port bow. That was all very well when we were off the north of Eigg; but is Dr. Sutherland aware that the south point of Eigg—Eilean-na-Castle—juts pretty far out; and is not that black line of land coming uncommonly close on our starboard bow? With some reluctance our new skipper consents to alter his course by a couple of points; and we bear away down for Ardnamurchan.

And of what did he not talk during the long starlit night—the person who ought to have been lookout sitting contentedly aft, a mute listener?—of the strange fears that must have beset the people who first adventured out to sea; of the vast expenditure of human life that must have been thrown away in the discovery of the most common facts about currents and tides and rocks; and so forth, and so forth. But ever and again his talk returned to Mary Avon.

"What does the Laird mean by his suspicions about her uncle?" he asked on one occasion—just as we had been watching a blue-white bolt flash down through the serene heavens and expire in mid-air.

"Mr. Frederick Smethurst has an ugly face."

"But what does he mean about those relations between the man with the ugly face and his niece?"

"That is idle speculation. Frederick Smethurst was her trustee, and might have done her some mischief—that is, if he is an out-and-out scoundrel; but that is all over. Mary is mistress of her own property now."

Here the boom came slowly swinging over; and

presently there were all the sheets of the head-sails to be looked after—tedious work enough for amateurs in the darkness of the night.

Then further silence; and the monotonous rush and murmur of the unseen sea; and the dark topmast describing circles among the stars. We get up one of the glasses to make astronomical observations, but the heaving of the boat somewhat interferes with this quest after knowledge. Whoever wants to have a good idea of forked lightning has only to take up a binocular on board a pitching yacht, and try to fix it on a particular planet.

The calm, solemn night passes slowly; the red and green lights shine on the black rigging; afar in the south burns the guiding star of Ardnamurchan. And we have drawn away from Eigg now, and passed the open sound; and there beyond the murmuring sea, is the gloom of the Island of Muick. All the people below are wrapped in slumber; the cabins are dark; there is only a solitary candle burning in the saloon. It is a strange thing to be responsible for the lives of those sleeping folk—out here on the lone Atlantic, in the stillness of the night.

Our young Doctor bears his responsibility lightly. He has—for a wonder—laid aside his pipe; and he is humming a song that he has heard Mary Avon singing of late—something about

O think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa',
For I'll come and see ye in spite o' them a',

and he is wishing the breeze would blow a bit harder —and wondering whether the wind will die away altogether when we get under the lee of Ardnamurchan Point.

But long before we have got down to Ardnamurchan, there is a pale grey light beginning to tell in the eastern skies; and the stars are growing fainter; and the black line of the land is growing clearer above the wrestling

seas. Is it a fancy that the first light airs of the morning are a trifle cold? And then we suddenly see, among the dark rigging forward, one or two black figures; and presently John of Skye comes aft, rubbing his eyes. He has had a good sleep at last.

Go below, then, you stout-sinewed young Doctor; you have had your desire of sailing the *White Dove* through the still watches of the night. And soon you will be asleep, with your head on the hard pillow of that little state-room; and though the pillow is not as hard as a stone, still the night and the sea and the stars are quickening to the brain; and who knows that you may not perchance after all dream of angels, or hear some faint singing far away?

. . . . . .

There was Mary Beaton—and Mary Seaton——

. . . . . .

Or is it only a sound of the waves?

CHAPTER XVII.

VILLANY ABROAD.

It is near mid-day; two late people are sitting at breakfast; the skylight overhead has been lifted, and the cool sea-air fills the saloon.

"Dead calm again," says Angus Sutherland, for he can see the rose-red ensign hanging limp from the mizen-mast, a blaze of colour against the still blue.

There is no doubt that the *White Dove* is quite motionless; and that a perfect silence reigns around her. That is why we can hear so distinctly—through the open skylight—the gentle footsteps of two people

who are pacing up and down the deck, and the soft voice of one of them as she speaks to her friend. What is all this wild enthusiasm about, then?

"It is the noblest profession in the world!"—we can hear so much as she passes the skylight. "One profession lives by fomenting quarrels; and another studies the art of killing in every form; but this one lives only to heal—only to relieve the suffering and help the miserable. That is the profession I should belong to, if I were a man!"

Our young Doctor says nothing as the voice recedes; but he is obviously listening for the return walk along the deck. And here she comes again.

"The patient drudgery of such a life is quite heroic—whether he is a man of science, working day and night to find out things for the good of the world, nobody thanking him or caring about him, or whether he is a physician in practice with not a minute that can be called his own—liable to be summoned at any hour——"

The voice again becomes inaudible. It is remarked to this young man that Mary Avon seems to have a pretty high opinion of the medical profession.

"She herself," he says hastily, with a touch of colour in his face, "has the patience and fortitude of a dozen doctors."

Once more the light tread on deck comes near the skylight.

"If I were the Government," says Mary Avon, warmly, "I should be ashamed to see so rich a country as England content to take her knowledge second-hand from the German Universities; while such men as Dr. Sutherland are harassed and hampered in their proper work by having to write articles and do ordinary doctor's visiting. I should be ashamed. If it is a want of money, why don't they pack off a dozen or two of the young noodles who pass the day whittling quills in the Foreign Office?——"

Even when modified by the distance, and by the soft lapping of the water outside, this seems rather strong language for a young lady. Why should Miss Avon again insist in such a warm fashion on the necessity of endowing research?

But Angus Sutherland's face is burning red. Listeners are said to hear ill of themselves.

"However, Dr. Sutherland is not likely to complain," she says, proudly, as she comes by again. "No; he is too proud of his profession. He does his work; and leaves the appreciation of it to others. And when everybody knows that he will one day be among the most famous men in the country, is it not monstrous that he should be harassed by drudgery in the mean time? If I were the Government——"

But Angus Sutherland cannot suffer this to go on. He leaves his breakfast unfinished, passes along the saloon, and ascends the companion.

"Good morning!" he says.

"Why, are you up already?" his hostess says. "We have been walking as lightly as we could, for we thought you were both asleep. And Mary has been heaping maledictions on the head of the Government because it doesn't subsidise all you microscope-men. The next thing she will want is a licence for the whole of you to be allowed to vivisect criminals."

"I heard something of what Miss Avon said," he admitted.

The girl, looking rather aghast, glanced at the open skylight.

"We thought you were asleep," she stammered, and with her face somewhat flushed.

"At least, I heard you say something about the Government," he said, kindly. "Well, all I ask from the Government is to give me a trip like this every summer."

"What," says his hostess, "with a barometer that won't fall?"

"I don't mind."

"And seas like glass?"

"I don't mind."

"And the impossibility of getting back to land?"

"So much the better," he says defiantly.

"Why," she reminds him, laughing, "you were very anxious about getting back some days ago. What has made you change your wishes?"

He hesitates for a moment, and then he says—

"I believe a sort of madness of idleness has got possession of me. I have dallied so long with that tempting invitation of yours to stay and see the *White Dove* through the equinoctials that—that I think I really must give in——"

"You cannot help yourself," his hostess says, promptly. "You have already promised. Mary is my witness."

The witness seems anxious to avoid being brought into this matter; she turns to the Laird quickly, and asks him some question about Ru-na-Gaul light over there.

Ru-na-Gaul light no doubt it is—shining white in the sun at the point of the great cliffs; and there is the entrance to Tobbermorry; and here is Mingary Castle—brown ruins amid the brilliant greens of those sloping shores—and there are the misty hills over Loch Sunart. For the rest, blue seas around us, glassy and still; and blue skies overhead, cloudless and pale. The barometer refuses to budge.

But suddenly there is a brisk excitement. What though the breeze that is darkening the water there is coming on right ahead?—we shall be moving any way. And as the first puffs of it catch the sails, Angus Sutherland places Mary Avon in command; and she is now—by the permission of her travelling physician—allowed to stand as she guides the course of the vessel. She has become an experienced pilot: the occasional glance at the leach of the top-sail is all that is needed;

she keeps as accurately "full and by" as the master of one of the famous cuptakers.

"Now, Mary," says her hostess, "it all depends on you as to whether Angus will catch the steamer this evening."

"Oh, does it?" she says, with apparent innocence.

"Yes; we shall want very good steering to get within sight of Castle Osprey before the evening."

"Very well, then," says this audacious person.

At the same instant she deliberately puts the helm down. Of course the yacht directly runs up to the wind, her sails flapping helplessly. Everybody looks surprised; and John of Skye, thinking that the new skipper has only been a bit careless, calls out—

"Keep her full, mem, if you please."

"What do you mean, Mary? What are you about?" cries Queen T.

"I am not going to be responsible for sending Dr. Sutherland away," she says, in a matter-of-fact manner, "since he says he is in no hurry to go. If you wish to drive your guest away, I won't be a party to it. I mean to steer as badly as I can."

"Then I depose you," says Dr. Sutherland promptly. "I cannot have a pilot who disobeys orders."

"Very well," she says, "you may take the tiller yourself"—and she goes away, and sits down in high dudgeon, by the Laird.

So once more we get the vessel under way; and the breeze is beginning to blow somewhat more briskly; and we notice with hopefulness that there is rougher water further down the Sound. But with this slow process of beating, how are we to get within sight of Castle Osprey before the great steamer comes up from the South?

The Laird is puzzling over the Admiralty Sailing Directions. The young lady, deeply offended, who sits beside him, pays him great attention, and talks

"at" the rest of the passengers with undisguised contempt.

"It is all haphazard, the sailing of a yacht," she says to him, though we can all hear. "Anybody can do it. But they make a jargon about it to puzzle other people, and pretend it is a science, and all that."

"Well," says the Laird, who is quite unaware of the fury that fills her brain, "there are some of the phrases in this book that are verra extraordinary. In navigating this same Sound of Mull, they say you are to keep the 'weather shore aboard.' How can ye keep the weather shore aboard?"

"Indeed, if we don't get into a port soon," remarks our hostess and chief commissariat-officer, "it will be the only thing we shall have on board. How would you like it cooked, Mary?"

"I won't speak to any of you," says the disgraced skipper, with much composure.

"Will you sing to us, then?"

"Will you behave properly if you are reinstated in command?" asked Angus Sutherland.

"Yes, I will," she says, quite humbly; and forthwith she is allowed to have the tiller again.

Brisker and brisker grows the breeze; it is veering to the south, too; the sea is rising, and with it the spirits of everybody on board. The ordinarily sedate and respectable *White Dove* is showing herself a trifle frisky, moreover; an occasional clatter below of hair-brushes or candlesticks tells us that people accustomed to calms fall into the habit of leaving their cabins ill-arranged.

"There will be more wind, sir," says John of Skye, coming aft; and he is looking at some long and streaky "mare's tails" in the south-western sky. "And if there wass a gale o' wind, I would let her have it!"

Why that grim ferocity of look, Captain John? Is the poor old *White Dove* responsible for the too fine weather, that you would like to see her driven, all wet

and bedraggled, before a south-westerly gale? If you must quarrel with something, quarrel with the barometer; you may admonish it with a belaying-pin if you please.

Brisker and brisker grows the breeze. Now we hear the first pistol-shots of the spray come rattling over the bows; and Hector of Moidart has from time to time to duck his head, or shake the water from his jersey. The *White Dove* breasts these rushing waves and a foam of white water goes hissing away from either side of her. Speine Môr and Speine Beg we leave behind; in the distance we can descry the ruins of Aros Castle and the deep indentation of Salen Bay; here we are passing the thick woods of Funeray. "*Farewell, farewell, to Funeray!*" The squally look in the south-west increases; the wind veers more and more. Commander Mary Avon is glad to resign the helm, for it is not easy to retain hold in these plunging seas.

"Why, you will catch the steamer after all, Angus!" says his hostess, as we go tearing by the mouth of Loch Aline.

"This is a good one for the last!" he calls to her. "Give her some more sheet, John! the wind is going round to the north!"

Whence comes the whirling storm in the midst of the calm summer weather? The blue heavens are as blue as the petal of a crane'sbill: surely such a sky has nothing to do with a hurricane. But wherever it comes from, it is welcome enough; and the brave *White Dove* goes driving through those heavy seas, sometimes cresting them buoyantly, at other times meeting them with a dull shock, followed by a swish of water that rushes along the lee scuppers. And those two women-folk—without ulsters or other covering: it is a merry game to play jack-in-the-box, and duck their heads under the shelter of the gig when the spray springs into the air. But somehow the sea gets the best of it. Laugh as they may, they

must be feeling rather damp about their hair; and as for Mary Avon's face—that has got a bath of salt-water at least a dozen times. She cares not. Sun, wind, and sea she allows to do their worst with her complexion. Soon we shall have to call her the Nut-brown Maid.

Brisker and brisker grows the breeze. Angus Sutherland, with a rope round the tiller, has his teeth set hard: he is indeed letting the *White Dove* have it at last, for he absolutely refuses to have the topsail down. The main tack, then: might not that be hauled up? No; he will have none of John of Skye's counsels. The *White Dove* tears her way through the water—we raise a cloud of birds from the rocks opposite Scallasdale—we see the white surf breaking in at Craignure—ahead of us is Lismore Lighthouse, perched over the whirling and struggling tides, shining white in the sunlight above the dark and driven sea.

Ahead she goes; the land she knows!

—past the shadowy ruins of Duart, and out and through the turbulent tides off the lighthouse rocks. The golden afternoon is not yet far advanced; let but this brave breeze continue, and soon they will descry the *White Dove* from the far heights of Castle Osprey!

But there was to be no Castle Osprey for Angus Sutherland that evening, despite the splendid run the *White Dove* had made. It was a race, indeed, between the yacht and the steamer for the quay; and notwithstanding that Mary Avon was counselling everybody to give it up as impossible, John of Skye would hold to it in the hope of pleasing Dr. Sutherland himself. And no sooner was the anchor let go in the bay, than the gig was down from the davits; the men had jumped in; the solitary portmanteau was tossed into the stern; and Angus Sutherland was hurriedly bidding his adieux. The steamer was at this instant slowing in to the quay.

"I forbid any one to say good-bye to him," says our Admiral-in-chief, sternly. "*Au revoir—auf Wiedersehen*—anything you like—no good-bye."

Last of all he took Mary Avon's hand.

"You have promised, you know," she said, with her eyes cast down.

"Yes," said he, regarding her for an instant with a strange look—earnest perhaps, and yet timid—as if it would ask a question, and dared not—"I will keep my promise." Then he jumped into the boat.

That was was a hard pull away to the quay; and even in the bay the water was rough, so that the back-sweep of the oars sometimes caught the waves and sent the spray flying in the wind. The *Chevalier* had rung her bells. We made sure he would be too late. What was the reason of this good-natured indulgence? We lost sight of the gig in at the landing-slip.

Then the great steamer slowly steamed away from the quay: who was that on the paddle-box waving good-bye to us?

"Oh, yes, I can see him plainly," calls out Queen T., looking through a glass; and there is a general waving of handkerchiefs in reply to the still visible signal. Mary Avon waves her handkerchief, too—in a limp fashion. We do not look at her eyes.

And when the gig came back, and we bade good-bye for the time to the brave old *White Dove*, and set out for Castle Osprey, she was rather silent. In vain did the Laird tell her some of the very best ones about Homesh; she seemed anxious so get into the house and to reach the solitude of her own room.

But in the mean time there was a notable bundle of letters, newspapers, and what not, lying on the hall-table. This was the first welcome that civilisation gave us. And although we defied these claims—and determined that not an envelope should be opened till after dinner—Mary Avon, having only one letter awaiting her, was allowed to read that. She did it

mechanically, listlessly—she was not in very good spirits. But suddenly we heard her utter some slight exclamation; and then we turned and saw that there was a strange look on her face—of dismay and dread. She was pale, too, and bewildered—like one stunned. Then, without a word, she handed the letter to her friend.

"What is the matter, Mary?"

But she read the letter—and, in her amazement, she repeated the reading of it, aloud. It was a brief, business-like, and yet friendly letter from the manager of a certain bank in London. He said he was sorry to refer to painful matters; but no doubt Miss Avon had seen in the papers some mention of the absconding of Mr. Frederick Smethurst, of ———. He hoped there was nothing wrong; but he thought it right to inform Miss Avon that, a day or two before this disappearance, Mr. Smethurst had called at the bank and received, in obedience to her written instructions, the securities—U.S. Funded Stock—which the bank held in her name. Mr. Smethurst had explained that these bonds were deliverable to a certain broker; and that securities of a like value would be deposited with the bank in a day or two afterwards. Since then nothing had been heard of him till the Hue and Cry appeared in the newspapers. Such was the substance of the letter.

"But it isn't true!" said Mary Avon, almost wildly. "I cannot believe it. I will not believe it. I saw no announcement in the papers. And I did give him the letter—he was acting quite rightly. What do they want me to believe?"

"Oh, Mary!" cries her friend, "why did you not tell us? Have you parted with everything?"

"The money?" says the girl—with her white face, and frightened pathetic eyes. "Oh, I do not care about the money! It has got nothing to do with the money. But—but—he—was my mother's only brother."

The lips tremble for a moment; but she collects herself. Her courage fights through the stun of this sudden blow.

"I will not believe it!" she says. "How dare they say such things of him? How is it we have never seen anything of it in the papers?"

But the Laird leaves these and other wild questions to be answered at leisure. In the mean time, his eyes are burning like coals of fire; and he is twisting his hands together in a vain endeavour to repress his anger and indignation.

"Tell them to put a horse to," he says in a voice the abruptness of which startles every one. "I want to drive to the telegraph-office. This is a thing for men to deal wi'—not weemen."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ULTIMATUM.

When our good friend the Laird of Denny-mains came back from the post-office, he seemed quite beside himself with wrath. And yet his rage was not of the furious and loquacious sort; it was reticent, and deep, and dangerous. He kept pacing up and down the gravel-path in front of the house, while as yet dinner was not ready. Occasionally he would rub his hands vehemently, as if to get rid of some sort of electricity; and once or twice we heard him ejaculate to himself, "The scoondrel! The scoondrel!" It was in vain that our gentle Queen Titania, always anxious to think the best of everybody, broke in on these fierce meditations, and asked the Laird to suspend his judgment. How could he be sure, she asked, that Frederick Smethurst had really run away

with his niece's little property? He had come to her and represented that he was in serious difficulties; that this temporary loan of seven thousand pounds or so would save him; that he would repay her directly certain remittances came to him from abroad. How could he, the Laird, know that Frederick Smethurst did not mean to keep his promise?

But Denny-mains would have none of these possibilities. He saw the whole story clearly. He had telegraphed for confirmation; but already he was convinced. As for Frederick Smethurst being a swindler—that did not concern him, he said. As for the creditors, that was their own look-out: men in business had to take their chance. But that this miscreant, this ruffian, this mean hound should have robbed his own niece of her last farthing—and left her absolutely without resources or protection of any kind in the world—this it was that made the Laird's eyes burn with a dark fire. "The scoondrel!—the scoondrel!" he said; and he rubbed his hands as though he would wrench the fingers off.

We should have been more surprised at this exhibition of rage on the part of a person so ordinarily placid as Denny-mains, but that every one had observed how strong had become his affection for Mary Avon during our long days on the Atlantic. If she had been twenty times his own daughter he could not have regarded her with a greater tenderness. He had become at once her champion and her slave. When there was any playful quarrel between the young lady and her hostess, he took the side of Mary Avon with a seriousness that soon disposed of the contest. He studied her convenience to the smallest particular when she wished to paint on deck; and so far from hinting that he would like to have Tom Galbraith revise and improve her work, he now said that he would have pride in showing her productions to that famous artist. And perhaps it was not quite so much the actual fact

of the stealing of the money as the manner and circumstance of it that now wholly upset his equilibrium, and drove him into this passion of rage. "The scoondrel!—the scoondrel!" he muttered to himself, in these angry pacings to and fro.

Then he surprised his hostess by suddenly stopping short, and uttering some brief chuckle of laughter.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said he, "for the leeberty I have taken; but I was at the telegraph-office in any case; and I thought ye would not mind my sending for my nephew Howard. Ye were so good as to say—"

"Oh, we shall be most pleased to see him," said she promptly. "I am sure he must have heard us talking about the yacht; he will not mind a little discomfort——"

"He will have to take what is given him, and be thankful," said the Laird, sharply. "In my opeenion the young people of the present day are too much given to picking and choosing. They will not begin as their parents began. Only the best of everything is good enough for them."

But here the Laird checked himself.

"No, no, ma'am," said he. "My nephew Howard is not like that. He is a good lad—a sensible lad. And as for his comfort on board that yacht, I'm thinking it's not that, but the opposite, he has to fear most. Ye are spoiling us all—the crew included."

"Now we must go in to dinner," is the practical answer.

"Has she come down?" asks the Laird, in a whisper.

"I suppose so."

In the drawing-room we found Mary Avon. She was rather pale, and silent—that was all; and she seemed to wish to avoid observation. But when dinner was announced the Laird went over to her, and took her hand, and led her into the dining-room, just

as he might have led a child. And he arranged her chair for her; and patted her on the back as he passed on, and said cheerfully—

"Quite right—quite right—don't believe all the stories ye hear. *Nil desperandum*—we're not beaten down yet!"

She sate cold and white, with her eyes cast down. He did not know that in the interval her hostess had been forced to show the girl that paragraph of the Hue and Cry.

"*Nil desperandum*—that's it," continued the good-hearted Laird, in his blithest manner. "Keep your own conscience clear, and let other people do as they please—that is the philosophy of life. That is what Dr. Sutherland would say to ye, if he was here."

This chance reference to Angus Sutherland was surely made with the best intentions; but it produced a strange effect on the girl. For an instant or two she tried to maintain her composure—though her lips trembled; then she gave way, and bent her head, and burst out crying, and covered her face with her hands. Of course her kind friend and hostess was with her in a moment, and soothed her, and caressed her, and got her to dry her eyes. Then the Laird said, after a second or two of inward struggle—

"Oh, do you know that there is a steamer run on the rocks at the mouth of Loch Etive?"

"Oh, yes," his hostess—who had resumed her seat—said cheerfully. "That is a good joke. They say the captain wanted to be very clever; and would not have a pilot, though he knows nothing about the coast. So he thought he would keep mid-channel in going into the Loch!"

The Laird looked puzzled: where was the joke?

"Oh," said she, noticing his bewilderment, "don't you know that at the mouth of Loch Etive the rocks are right in the middle, and the channel on each side?

He chose precisely the straight line for bringing his vessel full tilt on the rocks!"

So this was the joke, then: that a valuable ship should be sunk? But it soon became apparent that any topic was of profound interest—was exceedingly facetious even—that could distract Mary Avon's attention. They would not let her brood over this thing. They would have found a joke in a coffin. And indeed amidst all this talking and laughing Mary Avon brightened up considerably; and took her part bravely; and seemed to have forgotten all about her uncle and his evil deeds. You could only have guessed from a certain preoccupation that, from time to time, these words must have been appearing before her mind, their commonplace and matter-of-fact phraseology in no way detracting from their horrible import: "*Police-officers and others are requested to make immediate search and inquiry for the above named; and those stationed at sea-port towns are particularly requested to search outward-bound vessels.*" The description of Mr. Frederick Smethurst that preceded this injunction was not very flattering.

But among all the subjects, grave and gay, on which the Laird touched during this repast, there was none he was so serious and pertinacious about as the duty owed by young people to their parents and guardians. It did not seem an opportune topic. He might, for example, have enlarged upon the duties of guardians towards their helpless and unprotected wards. However, on this matter he was most decided. He even cross-examined his hostess, with an unusual sternness, on the point. What was the limit—was there any limit—she would impose on the duty which young folks owed to those who were their parents or who stood to them in the relation of parents? Our sovereign mistress, a little bit frightened, said she had always found her boys obedient enough. But this would not do. Considering the care and affection

bestowed on them—considering the hardly-earned wealth spent on them—considering the easy fortune offered to them—was it not bounden on young people to consult and obey the wishes of those who had done so much for them? She admitted that such was the case. Pressed to say where the limit of such duty should lie, she said there was hardly any. So far good; and the Laird was satisfied.

It was not until two days afterwards that we obtained full information by letter of what was known regarding the proceedings of Frederick Smethurst, who, it appears, before he bolted, had laid hands on every farthing of money he could touch, and borrowed from the credulous among his friends; so that there remained no reasonable doubt that the story he had told his niece was among his other deceptions, and that she was left penniless. No one was surprised. It had been almost a foregone conclusion. Mary Avon seemed to care little about it; the loss of her fortune was less to her than the shame and dishonour that this scoundrel had brought on her mother's name.

But this further news only served to stir up once more the Laird's slumbering wrath. He kept looking at his watch.

"She'll be off Easdale now," said he to himself; and we knew he was speaking of the steamer that was bringing his nephew from the south.

By and by—"She'll be near Kerrara, now," he said, aloud. "Is it not time to drive to the quay?"

It was not time, but we set out. There was the usual crowd on the quay when we got there; and far off we could descry the red funnels and the smoke of the steamer. Mary Avon had not come with us.

"What a beautiful day your nephew must have had for his sail from the Crinan," said the Laird's gentle hostess to him.

Did he not hear her? Or was he absorbed in his

own thoughts? His answer, at all events, was a strange one.

"It is the first time I have asked anything of him," he said almost gloomily. "I have a right to expect him to do something for me now."

The steamer slows in; the ropes are thrown across; the gangways run up; and the crowd begins to pour out. And here is a tall and handsome young fellow who comes along with a pleasant smile of greeting on his face.

"How do you do, Mr. Smith?" says Queen T., very graciously—but she does not call him "Howard" as she calls Dr. Sutherland "Angus."

"Well, uncle," says he, brightly, when he has shaken hands all round, "what is the meaning of it all? Are you starting for Iceland in a hurry? I have brought a rifle as well as my breechloader. But perhaps I had better wait to be invited?"

This young man with the clear, pale complexion, and the dark hair, and dark grey eyes, had good looks and a pleasant smile in his favour; he was accustomed to be made welcome; he was at ease with himself. He was not embarrassed that his uncle did not immediately answer; he merely turned and called out to the man who had got his luggage. And when we had got him into the waggonette, and were driving off, what must he needs talk about but the absconding of Mr. Frederick Smethurst, whom he knew to be the uncle of a young lady he had once met at our house.

"Catch him?" said he with a laugh. "They'll never catch him."

His uncle said nothing at all.

When we reached Castle Osprey, the Laird said in the hall, when he had satisfied himself that there was no one within hearing—

"Howard, I wish to have a few meenutes' talk with ye; and perhaps our good friends here will come into the room too——"

We followed him into the dining-room; and shut the door.

"—just to see whether there is anything unreasonable in what I have got to say to ye."

The young man looked rather alarmed; there was an unusual coldness and austerity in the elder man's voice.

"We may as well sit down," he said; "it wants a little explanation."

We sate down in silence, Howard Smith looking more concerned than ever. He had a real affection, as we knew, for this pseudo-uncle of his, and was astounded that he should be spoken to in this formal and cold manner.

The Laird put one or two letters on the table before him.

"I have asked our friends here," said he, in a calm and measured voice, "to listen to what I have to say, and they will judge whether it is unreasonable. I have a service to ask of ye. I will say nothing of the relations between you and me before this time—but I may tell ye frankly—what doubtless ye have understood—that I had intended to leave ye Denny-mains at my death. I have neither kith nor kin of my own blood; and it was my intention that ye should have Denny-mains—perhaps even before I was called away."

The young man said nothing; but the manner in which the Laird spoke of his intentions in the past sense might have made the most disinterested of heirs look frightened. After all, he had certainly been brought up on the understanding that he was to succeed to the property.

"Now," said he, slowly, "I may say I have shown ye some kindness——"

"Indeed you have, sir!" said the other warmly.

"—and I have asked nothing from ye in return. I would ask nothing now, if I was your age. If I was twenty years younger, I would not have telegraphed

for ye—indeed no, I would have taken the matter into my own hands——"

Here the Laird paused for a second or so to regain that coldness of demeanour with which he had started.

"Ay, just so. Well, ye were talking about the man Smethurst as we were coming along. His niece, as ye may be aware, is in this house—a better lass was never seen within any house."

The Laird hesitated more and more as he came to the climax of his discourse: it was obviously difficult for him to put this restraint on himself.

"Yes," said he, speaking a little more hurriedly, "and that scoondrel—that scoondrel—has made off with every penny that the poor lass had—every penny of it—and she is left an orphan—without a farthing to maintain herself wi'—and that infernal scoondrel——"

The Laird jumped from his seat; his anger was too much for him.

"I mean to stand by her," said he, pacing up and down the room, and speaking in short ejaculations. "She will not be left without a farthing. I will reach him too, if I can. Ay, ay, if I was but twenty years younger, and had that man before me!"

He stopped short opposite his nephew, and controlled himself so as to speak quite calmly.

"I would like to see ye settled at Denny-mains, Howard," said he. "And ye would want a wife. Now if ye were to marry this young leddy, it would be the delight of my old age to see ye both comfortable and well provided for. And a better wife ye would not get within this country. Not a better!"

Howard Smith stared.

"Why, uncle!" said he, as if he thought some joke was going forward. We, who had been aware of certain profound plans on the part of Denny-mains, were less startled by this abrupt disclosure of them.

"That is one of two things," said the Laird, with forced composure, "that I wished to put before ye. If

it is impossible, I am sorely vexed. But there is another; and one or the other, as I have been thinking, I am fairly entitled to ask of ye. So far I have not thought of any return for what I have done; it has been a pleasure to me to look after your up-bringing."

"Well, uncle," said the young man, beginning to look a little less frightened. "I would rather hear of the other thing. You know—eh—that is—a girl does not take anybody who is flung at her, as it were—it would be an insult—and—and people's inclinations and affections——"

"I know—I know—I know," said the Laird, impatiently. "I have gone over all that. Do ye think I am a fool? If the lass will not have ye, there is an end to it: do your best to get her, and that is enough for me."

"There was another thing—" the young man suggested timidly.

"Yes, there is," said the Laird, with a sudden change in his manner. "It is a duty, sir, ye owe not to me, but to humanity. Ye are young, strong, have plenty of time, and I will give ye the money. Find out that man Smethurst; get him face to face; and fell him! Fell him!"—the Laird brought his fist down on the table with a bang that made everything jump, and his eyes were like coals of fire. "None o' your pistols or rapiers or trash like that!—no, no!—a mark on his face for the rest of his life—the brand of a scoondrel between his eyes—there! will ye do that for me?"

"But, uncle," cried the young man, finding this alternative about as startling as the other, "how on earth can I find him? He is off to Brazil, or Mexico, or California, long ere now, you may depend on it."

The Laird had pulled himself together again.

"I have put two things before ye," said he, calmly. "It is the first time I have asked ye for a service, after having brought ye up as few lads have been brought up. If you think it is unfair of me to make

a bargain about such things, I will tell ye frankly that I have more concern in that young thing left to herself than in any creature now living on earth; and I will be a friend to her as well as an old man can. I have asked our friends here to listen to what I had to say; they will tell ye whether I am unreasonable. I will leave ye to talk it over."

He went to the door. Then he turned for a moment to his hostess.

"I am going to see, ma'am, if Mary will go for a bit walk wi' me—down to the shore, or the like; but we will be back before the hour for denner."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEW SUITOR.

It is only those who have lived with her for a number of years who can tell when a certain person becomes possessed with the demon of mischief, and allows sarcasm and malignant laughter and other unholy delights to run riot in her brain. The chief symptom is the assumption of an abnormal gravity, and a look of simple and confiding innocence that appears in the eyes. The eyes tell most of all. The dark pupils seem even clearer than is their wont, as if they would let you read them through and through; and there is a sympathetic appeal in them; the woman seems so anxious to be kind, and friendly, and considerate. And all the time—especially if it be a man who is hopelessly dumfoundered—she is revenging the many wrongs of her sex by covertly laughing at him and enjoying his discomfiture.

And no doubt the expression on Howard Smith's face, as he sat there in a bewildered silence, was

ludicrous enough. He was inclined to laugh the thing away as a joke, but he knew that the Laird was not given to practical jokes. And yet—and yet—

"Do you really think he is serious?" he blurted out at length, and he spoke to this lady with the gentle innocent eyes.

"Oh, undoubtedly," she answered, with perfect gravity.

"Oh, no; it is impossible!" he said, as if arguing with himself. "Why, my uncle, of all men in the world,—and pretending it was serious—of course people often do wish their sons or daughters to marry a particular person—for a sensible reason, to keep estates together, or to join the fortunes of a family—but this—no, no; this is a joke, or else he wants to drive me into giving that fellow a licking. And that, you know, is quite absurd; you might as well drag the Atlantic for a penknife."

"I am afraid your uncle is quite serious," said she, demurely.

"But it was to be left to you," he answered quickly. "You were to say whether it was unreasonable. Surely you must see it is not reasonable. Neither the one thing nor the other is possible—"

Here the young man paused for a moment.

"Surely," he said, "my uncle can't mean, by putting these impossible things before me, to justify his leaving his property to somebody else? There was no need for any such excuse; I have no claim on him; he has a right to do what he pleases."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Queen T. promptly. "Your uncle is quite resolved, I know, that you should have Denny-mains."

"Yes—and a wife," responded the young man, with a somewhat wry smile. "Oh, but you know, it is quite absurd; you will reason him out of it, won't you? He has such a high opinion of your judgment, I know."

The ingenious youth!

"Besides," said he warmly, "do you think it very complimentary to your friend Miss Avon that any one should be asked to come and marry her?"

This was better; it was an artful thrust. But the bland sympathetic eyes only paid him a respectful attention.

"I know my uncle is pretty firm when he has got a notion into his head," said he, "and—and—no doubt he is quite right in thinking that the young lady has been badly treated, and that somebody should give the absconder a thrashing. All that is quite right; but why should I be made responsible for it? I can't do impossible things."

"Well, you see," said his sage adviser, with a highly matter-of-fact air, "your uncle may not regard either the one thing or the other as impossible."

"But they are impossible," said he.

"Then I am very sorry," said she, with great sweetness. "Because Denny-mains is really a beautiful place. And the house would lend itself splendidly to a thorough scheme of re-decoration; the hall could be made perfectly lovely. I would have the wooden dado painted a dark bottle-green, and the wall over it a rich Pompeian red—I don't believe the colours of a hall can be too bold if the tones are good in themselves. Pompeian red is a capital back-ground for pictures, too; and I like to see pictures in the hall; the gentlemen can look at them while they are waiting for their wives. Don't you think Indian matting makes a very nice, serviceable, sober-coloured dado for a dining-room—so long as it does not drive your pictures too high on the wall?"

The fiendishness of this woman! Denny-mains was being withdrawn from him at this very moment; and she was bothering him with questions about its decoration. What did he think of Indian matting?

"Well," said he, "if I am to lose my chance of

Denny-mains through this piece of absurdity, I can't help it."

"I beg your pardon," said she most amiably; "but I don't think your uncle's proposal so very absurd. It is the commonest thing in the world for people to wish persons in whom they are interested to marry each other; and very often they succeed by merely getting the young people to meet, and so forth. You say yourself that it is reasonable in certain cases. Well, in this case, you probably don't know how great an interest your uncle takes in Miss Avon, and the affection that he has for her. It is quite remarkable. And he has been dwelling on this possibility of a match between you—of seeing you both settled at Denny-mains—until he almost regards it as already arranged. 'Put yourself in his place,' as Mr. Reade says. It seems to him the most natural thing in the world, and I am afraid he will consider you very ungrateful if you don't fall in with his plan."

Deeper and deeper grew the shadow of perplexity on the young man's brow. At first he had seemed inclined to laugh the whole matter aside, but the gentle reasoning of this small person had a ghastly aspect of seriousness about it.

"Then his notion of my seeking out the man Smethurst and giving him a thrashing: you would justify that, too?" he cried.

"No, not quite," she answered, with a bit of a smile. "That is a little absurd, I admit—it is merely an ebullition of anger. He won't think any more of that in a day or two I am certain. But the other—the other, I fear, is a fixed idea."

At this point we heard some one calling outside:

"Miss Mary! I have been searching for ye everywhere; are ye coming for a walk down to the shore?"

Then a voice, apparently overhead at an open window—

"All right, sir; I will be down in a moment."

Another second or two, and we hear some one singing on the stair, with a fine air of bravado—

A strong sou-wester's blowing, Billy; can't you hear it roar, now?

—the gay voice passes through the hall—

Lord help 'em, how I pities all un—

—then the last phrase is heard outside—

—folks on shore now—

Queen Titania darts to the open window of the dining-room.

"Mary! Mary!" she calls. "Come here."

The next instant a pretty enough picture is framed by the lower half of the window, which is open. The background is a blaze of scarlet and yellow and green —a mixture of sunlight and red poppies and nasturtiums and glancing fuchsia leaves. Then this slight figure that has appeared is dark in shadow; but there is a soft reflected light from the front of the house, and that just shows you the smile on Mary Avon's face and the friendliness of her dark soft eyes.

"Oh, how do you do?" she says, reaching in her hand and shaking hands with him. There is not any timidity in her manner. No one has been whispering to her of the dark plots surrounding her.

Nor was Mr. Smith much embarrassed, though he did not show himself as grateful as a young man might have done for so frank and friendly a welcome.

"I scarcely thought you would have remembered me," said he modestly. But at this moment Dennymains interfered, and took the young lady by the arm, and dragged her away. We heard their retreating footsteps on the gravel walk.

"So you remember her?" says our hostess, to break the awkward silence.

"Oh, yes, well enough," said he; and then he goes

on to say stammeringly—"Of course, I—I have nothing to say against her——"

"If you have," it is here interposed, as a wholesome warning, "you had better not mention it here. Ten thousand hornets' nests would be a fool compared to this house if you said anything in it against Mary Avon."

"On the contrary," says he, "I suppose she is a very nice girl indeed—very—I suppose there's no doubt of it. And if she has been robbed like that, I am very sorry for her; and I don't wonder my uncle should be interested in her, and concerned about her, and—and all that's quite right. But it is too bad—it is too bad—that one should be expected to—to ask her to be one's wife, and a sort of penalty hanging over one's head, too. Why, it is enough to set anybody against the whole thing; I thought everybody knew that you can't get people to marry if you drive them to it—except in France, I suppose, where the whole business is arranged for you by your relatives. This isn't France; and I am quite sure Miss Avon would consider herself very unfairly treated if she thought she was being made part and parcel of any such arrangement. As for me—well, I am very grateful to my uncle for his long kindness to me; he has been kindness itself to me; and it is quite true, as he says, that he has asked for nothing in return. Well, what he asks now is just a trifle too much. I won't sell myself for any property. If he is really serious—if it is to be a compulsory marriage like that—Denny-mains can go. I shall be able to earn my own living somehow."

There was a chord struck in this brief, hesitating, but emphatic speech that went straight to his torturer's heart. A look of liking and approval sprang to her eyes. She would no longer worry him.

"Don't you think," said she gently, "that you are taking the matter too seriously? Your uncle does not

wish to force you into a marriage against your will; he knows nothing about Adelphi melodramas. What he asks is simple and natural enough. He is, as you see, very fond of Mary Avon; he would like to see her well provided for; he would like to see you settled and established at Denny-mains. But he does not ask the impossible. If she does not agree, neither he nor you can help it. Don't you think it would be a very simple matter for you to remain with us for a time, pay her some ordinary friendly attention, and then show your uncle that the arrangement he would like does not recommend itself to either you or her? He asks no more than that; it is not much of a sacrifice."

There was no stammering about this lady's exposition of the case. Her head is not very big, but its perceptive powers are remarkable.

Then the young man's face brightened considerably.

"Well," said he, "that would be more sensible, surely. If you take away the threat, and the compulsion, and all that, there can be no harm in my being civil to a girl, especially when she is, I am sure, just the sort of girl one ought to be civil to. I am sure she has plenty of common sense——"

It is here suggested once more that, in this house, negative praise of Mary Avon is likely to awake slumbering lions.

"Oh, I have no doubt," says he readily, "that she is a very nice girl indeed. One would not have to pretend to be civil to some creature stuffed with affectation, or a ghoul. I don't object to this at all. If my uncle thinks it enough, very well. And I am quite sure that a girl you think so much of would have more self-respect than to expect anybody to go and make love to her in the country-bumpkin style."

Artful again; but it was a bad shot. There was just a little asperity in Madame's manner when she said—

"I beg you not to forget that Mary does not wish to be made love to by anybody. She is quite content

as she is. Perhaps she has quite other views, which you would not regret, I am sure. But don't imagine that she is looking for a husband; or that a husband is necessary for her; or that she won't find friends to look after her. It is your interests we are considering, not hers."

Was the snubbing sufficient?

"Oh, of course, of course," said he, quite humbly. "But then, you know, I was only thinking that—that—if I am to go in and make believe about being civil to your young lady-friend, in order to please my uncle, too much should not be expected. It isn't a very nice thing—at least, for you it may be very nice—to look on at a comedy——"

"And is it so very hard to be civil to a girl?" says his monitress sharply. "Mary will not shock you with the surprise of her gratitude. She might have been married ere now if she had chosen."

"She—isn't—quite a school-girl, you know," he says timidly.

"I was not aware that men preferred to marry school-girls," says the other, with a gathering majesty of demeanour.

Here a humble witness of this interview has once more to interpose to save this daring young man from a thunderbolt. Will he not understand that the remotest and most roundabout reflection on Mary Avon is in this house the unpardonable sin?

"Well," said he frankly, "it is exceedingly kind of you to show me how I am to get out of this troublesome affair; and I am afraid I must leave it to you to convince my uncle that I have done sufficient. And it is very kind of you to ask me to go yachting with you; I hope I shall not be in the way. And—and—there is no reason at all why Miss Avon and I should not become very good friends—in fact, I hope we shall become such good friends that my uncle will see we could not be anything else."

Could anything be fairer than this? His submission quite conquered his hostess. She said she would show him some of Mary Avon's sketches in oil, and led him away for that purpose. His warm admiration confirmed her good opinion of him; henceforth he had nothing to fear.

At dinner that evening he was at first a little shy; perhaps he had a suspicion that there were present one or two spectators of a certain comedy which he had to play all by himself. But, indeed, our eyes and ears were not for him alone. Miss Avon was delighting the Laird with stories of the suggestions she had got about her pictures from the people who had seen them —even from the people who had bought them—in London.

"And you know," said she quite frankly, "I must study popular taste as much as I fairly can now, for I have to live by it. If people will have sea-pieces spoiled by having figures put in, I must put in figures. By and by I may be in a position to do my own work in my own way."

The Laird glanced at his nephew: was it not for him to emancipate this great and original artist from the fear of critics, and dealers, and purchasers? There was no response.

"I mean to be in London soon myself," the Laird said abruptly; "ye must tell me where I can see some of your pictures."

"Oh, no," she said, laughing, "I shall not victimise my friends. I mean to prey on the public—if possible. It is Mr. White, in King Street, St. James's, however, who has taken most of my pictures hitherto; and so if you know of anybody who would like to acquire immortal works for a few guineas apiece, that is the address."

"I am going to London myself soon," said he, with a serious air, as if he had suddenly determined on buying the National Gallery.

Then Howard Smith, perceiving that no one was watching him, or expecting impossibilities of him, became quite cheerful and talkative; and told some excellent stories of his experiences at various shooting quarters the previous winter. Light-hearted, good-natured, fairly humorous, he talked very well indeed. We gathered that during the last months of the year the shooting of pheasants occupied a good deal more of his time and attention than the study of law. And how could one wonder that so pleasant-mannered a young man was a welcome guest at those various country-houses in the south?

But it appeared that, despite all this careless talk, he had been keeping an eye on Mary Avon during dinner. Walking down to the yacht afterwards—the blood-red not quite gone from the western skies, a cool wind coming up from the sea—he said casually to his uncle—

"Well, sir, whatever trouble that young lady may have gone through has not crushed her spirits yet. She is as merry as a lark."

"She has more than cheerfulness—she has courage," said the Laird, almost severely. "Oh, ay, plenty of courage. And I have no doubt she could fight the world for herself just as well as any man I know. But I mean to make it my business that she shall not have to fight the world for herself—not as long as there is a stick standing on Denny-mains!"

CHAPTER XX.

CHASING A THUNDERSTORM.

"*All on board then—all on board!*" the summons comes ringing through the wonder-land of dreams. And then, amid the general hurry and scurry throughout the house, certain half-bewildered people turn first of all to the windows of their rooms: a welcome sight! The glory of the summer dawn is shining over the mountains; the *White Dove*, with nearly all her sail set, is swinging there at her moorings; best of all, a strong breeze—apparently from the north-east—is ruffling the dark blue seas and driving a line of white surf on the further shores. The news comes that Master Fred, by darting about in the dingay since ever daylight began, has got the very last basket on board; the red caps are even now bringing the gig in to the landing slip; John of Skye is all impatience to take advantage of the favourable wind. There is but little time lost; the happy-go-lucky procession—*dona ferentes*—set out for the beach. And if the Laird is pleased to find his nephew apparently falling into his scheme with a good grace; and if the nephew thinks he is very lucky to get so easily out of an awkward predicament; and if Mary Avon—unconscious of these secret designs—is full of an eager delight at the prospect of being allowed to set to work again—may not all this account for a certain indecorous gaiety that startles the silence of the summer morning? Or is it that mythical hero Homesh who is responsible for this laughter? We hear the Laird chuckling; we notice the facetious wrinkles about his eyes; we make sure it must be Homesh. Then the final consignment of books, shawls, gun-cases, and what not is tossed into the gig; and away we go, with the measured dash of the oars.

And what does the bearded John of Skye think of the new hand we have brought him? Has he his own suspicions? Is his friend and sworn ally, Dr. Sutherland, to be betrayed and supplanted in his absence?

"Good morning, sir," he says obediently, at the gangway; and the quick Celtic eyes glance at Howard Smith from top to toe.

"Good morning, captain," the young man says lightly; and he springs too quickly up the steps, making a little bit of a stumble. This is not an auspicious omen.

Then on deck: the handsome figure and pleasant manner of this young man ought surely to prepossess people in his favour. What if his tightly-fitting garments and his patent-leather boots and white gaiters are not an orthodox yachting rig? John of Skye would not judge of a man by his costume. And if he does not seem quite at home—in this first look round—every one is not so familiar with boating life as Dr. Sutherland. It is true, an umbrella used as a walking-stick looks strange on board a yacht; and he need not have put it on the curved top of the companion, for it immediately rolls over into the scuppers. Nor does he seem to see the wickedness of placing a heavy bundle of canvases on the raised skylight of the ladies' cabin; does he want to start the glass? Dr. Sutherland, now, would have given the men a hand in hauling up the gig. Dr. Sutherland would not have been in the way of the tiller, as the yacht is released from her moorings.

Unaware of this rapid criticism, and unconcerned by all the bustle going on around, our new friend is carelessly and cheerfully chatting with his hostess; admiring the yacht; praising the beauty of the summer morning; delighted with the prospect of sailing in such weather. He does not share in the profound curiosity of his uncle about the various duties of the men. When John of Skye, wishing to leave the tiller for a minute to overhaul the lee tackle, turns quite

naturally to Mary Avon, who is standing by him, and says with a grin of apology, "If ye please, mem," the young man betrays but little surprise that this young lady should be entrusted with the command of the vessel.

"What!" he says, with a pleasant smile—they seem on very friendly terms already—"can you steer, Miss Avon? Mind you don't run us against any rocks."

Miss Avon has her eye on the mainsail. She answers, with a business-like air—

"Oh, there is no fear of that. What I have to mind, with this wind, is not to let her gybe, or I should get into disgrace."

"Then I hope you wont let her gybe, whatever that is," said he, with a laugh.

Never was any setting-out more auspicious. We seemed to have bade farewell to those perpetual calms. Early as it was in the morning, there was no still, dream-like haze about the mountains; there was a clear greenish-yellow where the sunlight struck them; the great slopes were dappled with the shadows of purple-brown; further away the tall peaks were of a decided blue. And then the windy, fresh, brisk morning; the *White Dove* running races with the driven seas; the white foam flying away from her sides. John of Skye seemed to have no fear of this gentle skipper. He remained forward, superintending the setting of the topsail; the *White Dove* was to "have it" while the fresh breeze continued to blow.

And still the squally easterly wind bears her bravely onward, the puffs darkening the water as they pass us and strike the rushing seas. Is that a shadow of Colonsay on the far southern horizon? The lighthouse people here have gone to bed; there is not a single figure along the yellow-white walls. Look at the clouds of gulls on the rocks, resting after their morning meal. By this time the deer have retreated into the high slopes above Craignure; there is a white foam

breaking along the bay of Innismore. And still the *White Dove* spins along, with foam-diamonds glittering in the sunlight at her bows; and we hear the calling of the sea-swallows, and the throbbing of a steamer somewhere in among the shadows of Loch Aline. Surely now we are out of the reign of calms; the great boom strains at the sheets; there is a whirl of blue waters; the *White Dove* has spread her wings at last.

"Ay, ay," says John of Skye, who has relieved Miss Avon at the helm; "it is a great peety."

"Why, John?" says she, with some surprise; is he vexed that we should be sailing well on this fine sailing day?

"It iss a great peety that Mr. Sutherland not here," said John, "and he wass know so much about a yacht, and day after day not a breeze at ahl. There iss not many chentlemen will know so much about a yacht as Mr. Sutherland."

Miss Avon did not answer, though her face seemed conscious in its colour. She was deeply engaged in a novel.

"Oh, that is the Mr. Sutherland who has been with you," said Howard Smith to his hostess, in a cheerful way. "A doctor, I think you said?"

At this Miss Avon looked up quickly from her book.

"I should have thought," said she with a certain dignity of manner, "that most people had heard of Dr. Angus Sutherland."

"Oh, yes, no doubt," said he, in the most good-natured fashion. "I know about him myself—it must be the same man. A nephew of Lord Foyers, isn't he? I met some friends of his at a house last winter; they had his book with them—the book about tiger-hunting in Nepaul, don't you know?—very interesting indeed it was, uncommonly interesting. I read it right through one night when everybody else was in bed——"

"Why, that is Captain Sutherland's book," said his hostess, with just a trace of annoyance. "They are not even related. How can you imagine that Angus Sutherland would write a book about tiger-hunting?—he is one of the most distinguished men of science in England."

"Oh, indeed," says the young man, with the most imperturbable good humour. "Oh, yes, I am sure I have heard of him—the Geographical Society, or something like that; really those evenings are most amusing. The women are awfully bored, and yet they do keep their eyes open somehow. But about those Indian fellows; it was only last winter that I heard how the —— —— manages to make those enormous bags, all to his own gun, that you see in the papers. Haven't you noticed them?"

Well, some of us had been struck with amazement by the reports of the enormous slaughter committed by a certain Indian prince; and had wondered at one of the gentle natives of the East taking so thoroughly and successfully to our robust English sports.

"Why," said this young man, "he has every covert laid out with netting, in small squares like a dice-board; and when he has done blazing away in the air, the under-keepers come up and catch every pheasant, hare, and rabbit that has run into the netting, and kill them, and put them down to his bag. Ingenious, isn't it? But I'll tell you what I have seen myself. I have seen Lord Justice —— deliberately walk down a line of netting and shoot every pheasant and rabbit that had got entangled. 'Safer not to let them get away,' says he. And when his host came up he said, 'Very good shooting; capital. I have got four pheasants and seven rabbits there; I suppose the beaters will pick them up.'"

And so the Youth, as we had got to call him, rattled on, relating his personal experiences, and telling such stories as occurred to him. There was a

good sprinkling of well-known names in this desultory talk; how could Miss Avon fail to be interested, even if the subject-matter was chiefly composed of pheasant-shooting, private theatricals, billiard matches on wet days, and the other amusements of country life?

The Laird, when he did turn aside from that huge volume of *Municipal London*—which he had brought with him for purposes of edification—must have seen and approved. If the young man's attentions to Mary Avon were of a distinctly friendly sort, if they were characterised by an obvious frankness, if they were quite as much at the disposal of Mr. Smith's hostess, what more could be expected? Rome was not built in a day. Meanwhile Miss Avon seemed very well pleased with her new companion.

And if it may have occurred to one or other of us that Howard Smith's talking, however pleasant and good-natured and bright, was on a somewhat lower level than that of another of our friends, what then? Was it not better fitted for idle sailing among summer seas? Now, indeed, our good friend the Laird had no need to fear being startled by the sudden propounding of conundrums.

He was startled by something else. Coming up from luncheon, we found that an extraordinary darkness prevailed in the western heavens — a strange bronze-purple gloom that seemed to contain within it the promise of a hundred thunderstorms. And as this fair wind had now brought us within sight of the open Atlantic, the question was whether we should make for Skye or run right under this lurid mass of cloud that appeared to lie all along the western shores of Mull. Unanimously the vote was for the latter course. Had not Angus Sutherland been anxious all along to witness a thunderstorm at sea? Might it not be of inestimable value to Miss Avon? John of Skye, not understanding these reasons, pointed out that the wind had backed somewhat to the north, and

that Mull would give us surer shelter than Skye for the night. And so we bore away past Quinish, the brisk breeze sending the *White Dove* along in capital style; past the mouth of Loch Cuan; past the wild Cailleach Point; past the broad Calgary Bay; and past the long headland of Ru-Treshanish. It was a strange afternoon. The sun was hidden; but in the south and west there was a wan, clear, silver glow on the sea; and in this white light the islands of Lunga, and Fladda, and Staffa, and the Dutchman were of sombre purple. Darker still were the islands lying towards the land — Gometra, and Ulva, and Inch Kenneth; while the great rampart of cliff from Loch-na-Keal to Loch Scridain was so wrapped in gloom that momentarily we watched for the first quivering flash of the lightning. Then the wind died away. The sea grew calm. On the glassy grey surface the first drops of the rain fell—striking black, and then widening out in small circles. We were glad of the cool rain, but the whispering of it sounded strangely in the silence.

Then, as we are still watching for the first silver-blue flash of the lightning, behold! the mighty black wall of the Bourg and Gribun cliffs slowly, mysteriously disappears; and there is only before us a vague mist of grey. Colonsay is gone; Inch Kenneth is gone; no longer can we make out the dark rocks of Erisgeir. And then the whispering of the sea increases; there is a deeper gloom over head; the rain-king is upon us! There is a hasty retreat down-stairs; the hatches are shoved over; after dinner we shall see what this strange evening portends.

"I hope we shall get into the Sound of Ulva before dark," says Miss Avon.

"I wish Angus was on board. It is a shame he should be cheated out of his thunderstorm. But we shall have the equinoctials for him, at all events," says Queen Titania—just as if she had a series of

squalls and tempests bottled, labelled, and put on a shelf.

When we get on deck again we find that the evening, but not the *White Dove*, has advanced. There is no wind; there is no rain; around us there is the silent, glassy, lilac-grey sea, which, far away in the west, has one or two gleams of a dull bronze on it, as if some afterglow were struggling through the clouds at the horizon. Along the Gribun cliffs, and over the islands, the gloom has surely increased; it were better if we were in some shelter for this night.

Then a noise is heard that seems to impose a sudden silence—thunder, low, distant, and rumbling. But there is no splendid gleam through the gathering gloom of the night: the Gribun cliffs have not spoken yet.

John of Skye has carelessly seated himself on one of the deck-stools; his arm hangs idly on the tiller; we guess, rather than hear, that he is regaling himself with the sad, monotonous *Farewell to Fuineray*. He has got on his black oilskins, though there is not a drop of rain.

By and by, however, it being now quite dark, he jumps to his feet, and appears to listen intently.

"Ay, do ye hear it?" he says, with a short laugh. "And it iss off the land it iss coming!"

He calls aloud—"Look out, boys! it is a squahl coming over, and we'll hev the topsail down whatever!"

Then we hear a distant roaring; and presently the headsails are violently shaken, and the great boom swings over as John puts the helm up to get way on her. The next instant we are racing in for the land, as if we mean to challenge the heavy squall that is tearing across from the unseen Gribun cliffs. And now the rain-clouds break in deluges; the men in their oilskins go staggering this way and that along the slippery decks; the *White Dove* is wrestling with

the sudden storm; another low murmur of thunder comes booming through the darkness. What is that solitary light far in there towards the land?—dare any steamer venture so near the shore on such a night? And we, too; would it not be safer for us to turn and run out to sea rather than beat against a squall into the narrow and shallow channels of Ulva's Sound? But John of Skye is not afraid. The wind and sea cannot drown his strident voice; the rain deluge cannot blind the trained eyes; the men on the look-out—when the bow of the boat springs high on a wave, we can see the black figures against the sombre sky—know the channels too; we are not afraid to make for Ulva's Sound.

There is a wild cry from one of the women; she has caught sight, through the gloom, of white foam dashing on the rocks.

"It is all right, mem!" John calls aloud, with a laugh; but all the same the order is shouted, "*Ready about!*"—"*Ready about!*" is the call coming back to us from the darkness. "'*Bout ship!*" and then away she sheers from that ugly coast.

We were after all cheated of our thunderstorm, but it was a wild and a wet night nevertheless. Taking in the mizen was no joke amid this fury of wind and rain, but that and the hauling up of the main-tack lessened the pressure on her. John of Skye was in high spirits. He was proud of his knowledge of the dangerous coast; where less familiar eyes saw only vague black masses looming out of the darkness he recognised every rock and headland.

"No, no, mem," he was calling out in friendly tones; "we not hef to run out to sea at ahl. We will get into the Sound of Ulva ferry well; and there will not be any better anchorage as the Sound of Ulva, when you are acquaint. But a stranger—I not ask a stranger to go into the Sound of Ulva on so dark a night."

What is this we hear?—"*Down foresail, boys!*"

and there is a rattle on to the decks. The head of the yacht seems to sway round; there ia a loud flapping of sails. "*Down chub!*"—and there are black figures struggling up there at the bowsprit; but vaguely seen against the blackness of the sky and the sea. Then, in a second or two, there is a fiercer rattle than ever; the anchor is away with a roar. Some further chain is paid out; then a strange silence ensues; we are anchored in Ulva's Sound.

Come down into the cabin, then, you women-folk, and dry your streaming faces, and arrange your dishevelled hair. Is not this a wonderful stillness and silence after the whirl and roar of the storm outside? But then you must know that the waters are smooth in here; and the winds become gentle—as gentle as the name of the island that is close to us now in the dark. It is a green-shored island. The sailors call it *Ool-a-va.*

CHAPTER XXI.

CHASING SEALS.

NEXT morning found the Laird in a most excellent humour. All was going well. Though nothing had been said or promised by the Youth, was not his coming away with us into these remote solitudes—to say nothing of the very pleasant manner in which he sought to entertain Miss Mary Avon—sufficient evidence that he had at least no great repugnance to his uncle's scheme? The Laird was disposed to chuckle privately over the anxiety that Mary displayed about her work. The poor young thing: she did not understand what higher powers were ordering her future for her.

"Let her work on," the Laird said, in great confidence, to his hostess, and there was a fine secret

humour in his eyes. "Ay, ay, let her work on: hard work never harmed anybody. And if she brings her bit mailin to the marriage—ye would call it her dowry in the south—in the shape of a bundle of pictures—just as a young Scotch lass brings a chest of drawers or a set of napery—she will not be empty-handed. She can hang them up herself at Denny-mains."

"You are looking too far ahead, sir," says Queen T., with a quiet smile.

"Maybe—maybe," says the Laird, rubbing his hands with a certain proud satisfaction. "We'll see who's right—we will see who is right, ma'am."

Then, at breakfast, he was merry, complaisant, philosophical in turns. He told us that the last vidimus of the affairs of the Burgh of Strathgovan was most satisfactory: assets about 35,000*l.*; liabilities not over 20,000*l.*; there was thus an estimated surplus of no less than 15,000*l.* Why, then, he asked, should certain poor creatures on the Finance Committee make such a work about the merest trifles? Life was not given to a man that he should worry himself into a rage about a penny farthing.

"There is a great dale of right down common sense, ma'am," said he, "in that verse that was written by my countryman, Welliam Dunbaur—

> Be merry man, and tak not sair in mind
> The wavering of this wretched world of sorrow;
> To God be humble, to thy friend be kind,
> And with thy neighbours gladly lend and borrow;
> His chance to-night, it may be thine to-morrow;
> Be blythe in heart for any aventûre,
> For oft with wise men it has been said aforow,
> Without Gladnésse availeth no Treasûre."

But we, who were in the secret, knew that this quotation had nothing in the world to do with the Finance Committee of Strathgovan. The Laird had been comforting himself with these lines. They were a sort of philosophico-poetical justification of himself

to himself for his readiness to make these two young people happy by giving up to them Denny-mains.

And no doubt he was still chuckling over the simplicity of this poor girl, when, after breakfast, he found her busily engaged in getting her painting materials on deck.

"Beautiful—beautiful," said he glancing around. "Ye will make a fine picture out of those mountains, and the mist, and the still sea. What an extraordinary quiet after last night's rain!"

And perhaps he was thinking how well this picture would look in the dining-room at Denny-mains; and how a certain young hostess—no longer pale and fragile, but robust and sun-browned with much driving in a pony-carriage—would take her friends to the picture, and show them Ulva, and Loch-na-Keal, and Ben-More; and tell them how this strange quiet and beauty had followed on a wild night of storm and rain. The world around us was at this moment so quiet that we could hear the twittering of some small bird among the rocks in there at the shore. And the pale, wan, dream-like sea was so perfect a mirror that an absolutely double picture was produced—of the gloomy mountain-masses of Ben-More, amid silver gleams of cloud and motionless wreaths of mist; of the basaltic pillars of the coast nearer at hand—a pale reddish-brown, with here and there a scant sprinkling of grass; of that broad belt of rich orange-yellow seaweed that ran all along the rocks, marking the junction of the world of the land with the water-world below. An absolutely perfect mirror; except when some fish splashed; then the small circles widened out and gradually disappeared; and the surface was as glassy as before.

The Laird was generous. He would leave the artist undisturbed at her work. Would not his nephew be better amused if a bachelor expedition were fitted out to go in search of the seals that abound in the channels around Inch Kenneth? Our hostess declined to go;

but provided us with an ample lunch. The gig was lowered; and everything ready for the start.

"Bring your shot-gun, too, Howard," said the Laird. "I want ye to shoot some skarts. I am told that the breasts of them are very close and fine in the feathers; and I would like a muff or a bag made of them for a leddy—for a young leddy."

Mary Avon was busy with her work: how could she hear?

"And if the skin of the seals about here is not very fine, we will make something of it. Oh, ay, we will make something of it in the way of a present. I know a man in Glasgow who is extraordinary clever at such things."

"We have first to get the seal, uncle," said his nephew, laughing. "I know any number of men who assure you they have shot seals; but not quite so many who have got the seals that were shot."

"Oh, but we'll get the seal, and the skarts, too," said the Laird; and then he added, grimly, "Man, if ye cannot do that, what can ye do? If ye cannot shoot well, what else are ye fit for?"

"I really don't know, uncle," the Youth confessed modestly, as he handed down his rifle into the gig. "The London solicitors are a blind race. If they only knew what a treasure of learning and sound judgment they might have for the asking: but they don't. And I can't get any of the Scotch business you were talking about; because my name doesn't begin with Mac."

"Well, well, we must wait, and hope for the best," said the Laird, cheerfully, as he took his seat in the stern of the gig. "We are not likely to run against a solicitor in the Sound of Ulva. Sufficient for the day. As I was saying, there's great common sense in what Welliam Dunbaur wrote—

> Be blythe in heart for any aventûre,
> For oft with wise men it has been said aforow,
> Without Gladnésse availeth no Treasûre.

—Bless me, look at that!"

This sudden exclamation sent all eyes to the shore. A large heron, startled by the rattling of the oars, had risen, with a sharp and loud croak of alarm, from among the sea-weed, his legs hanging down, his long neck, and wings, and body apparently a grey-white against the shadow of the basaltic rocks. Then, lazily flapping, he rose higher and higher; he tucked up his legs; the great wings went somewhat more swiftly; and then, getting above the low cliffs, and appearing quite black against the silver-clear sky, he slowly sailed away.

The silence of this dream-like picture around us was soon broken. As the men pulled away from the yacht, the lonely shores seemed to waken up into life; and there were whistlings, and callings, and warnings all along the cliffs; while the startled sea-birds whirred by in flashes of colour, or slowly and heavily betook themselves to some further promontory. And now, as we passed along the narrow Sound, and saw through the translucent water the wonder-land of sea-weed below—with the patches of clear yellow sand intervening—we appreciated more and more highly the skill of John of Skye in getting us into such a harbour on the previous night. It is not every one who, in pitch darkness and in the midst of squalls, can run a yacht into the neck of a bottle.

We emerged from the narrow channel, and got out into the open: but even the broad waters of Loch-na-Keal were pale and still: the reflection of Eorsa was scarcely marred by a ripple. The long, measured throb of the rowing was the only sound of life in this world of still water and overhanging cloud. There was no stroke-oar now to give the chorus

A long, strong pull together,
Ho, ro, clansmen.

But still we made good way. As we got further out, we came in sight of Little Colonsay; and further off

still, Staffa, lying like a dark cloud on the grey sea. Inch Kenneth, for which we were making, seemed almost black; although, among the mists that lay along the Gribun and Bourg cliffs, there was a dull silver-yellow light, as though some sunlight had got mixed up with the clouds.

"No, no," the Laird was saying, as he studied a scrap of paper, "it is not a great property to admeenister; but I am strong in favour of local management. After reading that book on London, and its catalogue of the enormous properties there, our little bit Burgh appears to be only a toy; but the principle of sound and energetic self-government is the same. And yet it is no so small, mind ye. The Burgh buildings are estimated at nineteen thousand pounds odd; the furniture at twelve hundred pounds; lamps near on two thousand five hundred; sewers nine thousand pounds odd; and then debts not far from three thousand pounds—that makes our assets just about thirty-five thousand. And if the water-pipes in some places are rather too small for the steam fire-engine, we maun have them bigger. It was quite rideeculous that a thriving place like Strathgovan, when there was a big fire, should have to run to Glesca for help. No, no; I believe in independence; and if ye should ever live in our neighbourhood, Howard, I hope ye will stand out against the policy of annexation. It is only a lot o' Radical bodies that are for upsetting institutions that have been tried by time and not found wanting."

"Oh, certainly, sir," Howard Smith said blithely. "When you educate people to take an interest in small parochial matters, they are better fitted to give an opinion about the general affairs of the country."

"Small?" said the Laird, eyeing him severely. "They are of as much importance as human life; is there anything of greater importance in the world? By abolishin' the Coulterburn nuisance, and insisting

on greater cleanliness and ventilation, we have reduced the number of deaths from infectious diseases in a most extraordinar' manner; and there will be no more fear of accidents in the Mitherdrum Road, for we are going to have a conteenuous line of lamps that'll go right in to the Glesca lamps. I do not call these small matters. As for the asphalting of the pavement in front of John Anderson's line of houses," continued the Laird, as he consulted the memorandum in his hand, "that is a small matter, if ye like. I am not disposed to pronounce an opinion on that matter: they can settle it without my voice. But it will make a great difference to John Anderson; and I would like to see him come forward with a bigger subscription for the new Park. Well, well; we must fight through as best we can."

It was here suggested to the Laird that he should not let these weighty matters trouble him while he is away on a holiday.

"Trouble me?" said he, lightly. "Not a bit, man! People who have to meddle in public affairs must learn how to throw off their cares. I am not troubled. I am going to give the men a dram; for better pulling I never saw in a boat!"

He was as good as his word, too. He had the luncheon-basket handed down from the bow; he got out the whisky bottle; there was a glass filled out for each of the men, which was drunk in solemn silence.

"Now, boys," said he, as they took to their oars again, "haven't ye got a song or a chorus to make the rowing easy?"

But they were too shy for a bit. Presently, however, we heard at the bow a low, plaintive, querulous voice; and the very oars seemed to recognise the air as they gripped the water. Then there was a hum of a chorus—not very musical—and it was in the Gaelic—but we knew what the refrain meant.

Ō bōatmān, ă fārewĕll tō yŏu,
Ō bōatmān, ă fārewĕll tō yŏu,
Whĕrēvēr yŏu māy bĕ gōĭng.

That is something like the English of it: we had heard the *Fhir a Bhata* in other days.

The long, heavy pull is nearly over. Here are the low-lying reefs of rock outside Inch Kenneth; not a whisper is permissible as we creep into the nearest bay. And then the men and the boat are left there; and the Youth—perhaps dimly conscious that his uncle means the seal-skin for Mary Avon—grasps his rifle and steals away over the undulating shelves of rock; while his two companions, with more leisure but not with less circumspection, follow to observe his operations. Fortunately there is no screaming sea-pyot or whistling curlew to give warning; stealthily, almost bent in two, occasionally crawling on all fours, he makes his way along the crannies in the reef, until, as we see, he must be nearly approaching the channel on his left. There he pauses to take breath. He creeps behind a rock; and cautiously looks over. He continues his progress.

"This is terrible woark," says the Laird, in a stage-whisper, as he, too—with a much heavier bulk to carry—worms along. From time to time he has to stay to apply his handkerchief to his forehead; it is hot work on this still, breathless day.

And at last we, too, get down to the edge of a channel—some hundred yards lower than Howard Smith's post—and from behind a rock we have a pretty clear view of the scene of operations. Apparently there is no sign of any living thing—except that a big fish leaps into the air, some dozen yards off. Thereafter a dead silence.

After waiting about a quarter of an hour or so, the Laird seemed to become violently excited, though he would neither budge nor speak. And there, between

two islands right opposite young Smith, appeared two shining black heads on the still water; and they were evidently coming down this very channel. On they came—turning about one way and another, as if to look that the coast was clear. Every moment we expected to hear the crack of the rifle. Then the heads silently disappeared.

The Laird was beside himself with disappointment.

"Why did he no shoot? Why did he no shoot?" he said, in an excited whisper.

He had scarcely spoken when he was startled by an apparition. Right opposite to him—not more than twenty yards off—a black thing appeared on the water—with a glistening smooth head, and large, soft eyes. Then another. We dared not move. We waited for the whistle of the rifle-bullet. The next instant the first seal caught sight of the Laird; raised its head for an instant at least six inches higher; then silently plunged along with its companion. They were gone, at all events.

The Youth came marching along the rocks, his rifle over his shoulder.

"Why didn't you fire?" his uncle said, almost angrily.

"I thought they were coming nearer," said he. "I was just about to fire when they dived. Mind, it isn't very easy to get on to a thing that is bobbing about like that, with a rifle. I propose we have luncheon, now, until the tide ebbs a bit; then there may be a chance of catching one lying on the rocks. That is the proper time for getting a shot at a seal."

We had luncheon: there was no difficulty about securing that. But as for getting at the seals—whether we crawled over the rocks, or lay in hiding, or allowed the boat to drift towards some island, on the chance of one of them rising in our neighbourhood—it was no use at all. There were plenty of seals about: a snap shot now and again served to break the

monotony of the day; but that present for Mary Avon seemed as remote as ever. And when one is determined on shooting a seal, one is not likely to waste one's attention, and cartridges, on such inferior animals as skarts.

The silver-grey day became more golden; there was a touch of warm purple about the shadows of Staffa.

"Come," said the Laird at last. "We must go back. It is no use. I have often heard people say that if you miss the first chance at a seal it never gives ye another."

"Better luck next time, uncle," said the Youth; but his uncle refused to be comforted. And the first thing he said to Mary Avon when he got back to the yacht was—

"We have not got it."

"Got what?" said she.

"The seal-skin I wanted to have dressed for ye. No, nor the skarts I wanted to have made into a muff or a bag for ye."

"Oh," said she, promptly, "I am very glad. I hope you won't shoot any of those poor things on my account; I should be very sorry indeed."

The Laird took this as one of the familiar protestations on the part of women, who wouldn't for the world have poor things shot, but who don't object to wearing any amount of furs and feathers, to say nothing of having innocent sheep sheared and harmless silk-worms robbed in order to deck themselves out. She should have that dressed seal-skin, and that muff of skarts' breasts, all the same.

Nothing of stupendous importance happened that evening except that—after we had caught three dozen of good-sized lithe and returned to the yacht with this welcome addition to our stores—there was a general discussion of our plans for the next few days. And our gentle hostess was obviously looking forward

to Angus Sutherland's coming back to us with great pleasure; and we were to make our return to suit his convenience; and she would write to him whenever we got near a post-office again.

Mary Avon had sate silent during all this. At last, she said—apparently with some effort and yet very deliberately—

"I—I think you are a little cruel to Dr. Sutherland. You are forcing him to come with you against his better judgment—for you know, with his prospects, and the calls on his time, he cannot afford such long idleness. Do you think it is quite fair?"

The woman stared at this girl, who spoke with some earnestness, though her eyes were downcast.

"He would do anything to please you," Mary Avon continued, as if she were determined to get through with some speech that she had prepared, "and he is very fond of sailing: but do you think you should allow him to injure his prospects in this way? Wouldn't it be a greater kindness to write and say that, if he really feels he ought to return to London, you would not hold him to his promise? I am sure he would not be offended: he would understand you at once. And I am sure he would do what is clearly right: he would go straight back to London, and resume his work—for his own sake and for the sake of those who count on a great future for him. I, for one, should be very sorry to see him come back to idle away his time in sailing."

And still Queen Tita stared at the girl, though their eyes did not meet. And she could scarcely believe that it was Mary Avon who had counselled this cold dismissal.

CHAPTER XXII.

"UNCERTAIN, COY, AND HARD TO PLEASE."

THERE are two people walking up and down the deck this beautiful morning: the lazy ones are still below, dawdling over breakfast. And now young Smith, though he is not much more than an acquaintance, talks quite confidentially to his hostess. She has his secret; he looks to her for aid. And when they do have a quiet moment like this together there is usually but one person of whom they speak.

"I must say she has an extraordinary spirit," he observes, with some decision. "Why, I believe she is rather pleased than otherwise to have lost that money. She is not a bit afraid of going up to London to support herself by her work. It seems to amuse her on the whole!"

"Mary has plenty of courage," says the other quietly.

"I don't wonder at my uncle being so fond of her: he likes her independent ways and her good humour. I shouldn't be surprised if he were to adopt her as his daughter, and cut me out. There would be some sense in that."

"I am glad you take it so coolly," says our governor-general, in a matter-of-fact way that rather startles him. "More unlikely things have happened."

But he recovers himself directly.

"No, no," says he, laughing. "There is one objection. She could not sit on any of the parochial Boards of Strathgovan. Now I know my uncle looks forward to putting me on the Police Committee and the Lighting Committee, and no end of other Committees. By the way, she might go on the School Board. Do they have women on the School Boards in Scotland?"

On this point his hostess was no better informed than himself.

"Well," said he, after a bit, "I wouldn't call her pretty, you know; but she has a singularly interesting face."

"Oh, do you think so?" says the other, quite innocently.

"I do, indeed," answers the ingenuous Youth. "And the more you see of her the more interesting it becomes. You seem to get so well acquainted with her somehow; and—and you have a sort of feeling that her presence is sort of necessary."

This was somewhat vague; but he made another wild effort to express himself.

"What I mean is—that—that suppose she were to leave the yacht, wouldn't the saloon look quite different? And wouldn't the sailing be quite different? You would know there was something wanting."

"I should, indeed," is the emphatic reply.

"I never knew any one," says the Youth, warming to his work of thorough explanation, "about whose presence you seem so conscious—even when she isn't here—I don't mean that exactly—I mean that at this moment now, you know she is on board the yacht—and it would be quite different if she were not. I suppose most people wouldn't call her pretty. There is nothing of the Book of Beauty about her. But I call it a most interesting face. And she has fine eyes. Anybody must admit that. They have a beautiful, soft expression; and they can laugh even when she is quite silent——"

"My dear Mr. Smith," says his hostess, suddenly stopping short, and with a kind of serious smile on her face, "let me talk frankly to you. You acted very sensibly, I think, in coming with us to humour your uncle. He will come to see that this scheme of his is impracticable; and in the mean time, if you don't mind the discomfort of it, you have a holiday. That is all

quite well. But pray don't think it necessary that you should argue yourself into falling in love with Mary. I am not in her confidence on such a delicate matter; but one has eyes; and I think I might almost safely say to you that, even if you persuaded yourself that Mary would make an excellent wife—and be presentable to your friends—I say even if you succeeded in persuading yourself, I am afraid you would only have thrown that labour away. Please don't try to convince yourself that you ought to fall in love with her."

This was plain speaking. But then our admiral-in-chief was very quickly sensitive where Mary Avon was concerned; and perhaps she did not quite like her friend being spoken of as though she were a pill that had to be swallowed. Of course the Youth instantly disclaimed any intention of that kind. He had a very sincere regard for the girl, so far as he had seen her; he was not persuading himself; he was only saying how much she improved when you got better acquainted with her.

"And if," said he, with just a touch of dignity, "if Miss Avon is—is—engaged——"

"Oh, I did not say that," his hostess quickly interposed. "Oh, certainly not. It was only a guess on my part——"

"——or likely to be engaged," he continued, with something of the same reserve, "I am sure I am very glad for her sake; and whoever marries her ought to have a cheerful home and a pleasant companion."

This was a generous sentiment; but there was not much of a "wish you-may-be-happy" air about the young man. Moreover, where was the relief he ought to have experienced on hearing that there was an obstacle—or likelihood of an obstacle—to the execution of his uncle's scheme which would absolve him from responsibility altogether?

However, the subject could not be continued just

then; for at this moment a tightly-brushed small head, and a narrow-brimmed felt hat, and a shapely neck surrounded by an upstanding collar and bit of ribbon of navy-blue, appeared at the top of the companion, and Mary Avon, looking up with her black eyes full of a cheerful friendliness, said—

"Well, John, are you ready to start yet?"

And the great, brown-bearded John of Skye, looking down at this small Jack-in-the-box with a smile of welcome on his face, said—

"Oh, yes, mem, when the breakfast is over."

"Do you think it is blowing outside, then?"

"Oh, no, mem, but there is a good breeze; and maybe there will be a bit of a rowl from the Atlantic. Will Mr. —— himself be for going now?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," she says, with a fine assumption of authority. "We are quite ready when you are ready, John; Fred will have the things off the table in a couple of minutes."

"Very well, mem," says the obedient John of Skye, going forward to get the men up to the windlass.

Our young Doctor should have been there to see us getting under way. The Sound of Ulva is an excellent harbour and anchorage when you are once in it; but getting out of it, unless with both wind and tide in your favour, is very like trying to manœuvre a man-of-war in a tea-cup. But we had long ago come to the conclusion that John of Skye could sail the *White Dove* through a gas-pipe, with half a gale of wind dead in his teeth; and the manner in which he got us out of this narrow and tortuous channel fully justified our confidence.

"Very prettily done, Captain John!" said the Laird —who was beginning to give himself airs on nautical matters—when we had got out into the open.

And here, as we soon discovered, was the brisk fresh breeze that John of Skye had predicted; and the running swell, too, that came sweeping in to the mouth

of Loch-na-Keal. Black indeed looked that far-reaching loch on this breezy, changeful morning—as dark as it was when the chief of Ulva's Isle came down to the shore with his runaway bride; and all along Ben-More and over the Gribun cliffs hung heavy masses of cloud, dark and threatening as if with thunder. But far away in the south there was a more cheerful outlook; the windy sea shimmering in light; some gleams of blue in the sky; we knew that the sunshine must be shining on the green clover and the beautiful sands of Iona. The *White Dove* seemed to understand what was required of her. Her head was set for the gleaming south; her white wings outspread; as she sprang to meet those rushing seas we knew we were escaping from the thunder-darkness that lay over Loch-na-Keal.

And Ulva: had we known that we were now leaving Ulva behind us for the last time, should we not have taken another look back, even though it now lay under a strange and mysterious gloom? Perhaps not. We had grown to love the island in other days. And when one shuts one's eyes in winter, it is not to see an Ulva of desolate rocks and leaden waves; it is a fair and shining Ulva, with blue seas breaking whitely along its shores; and magical still channels, with mermaid's halls of seaweed; and an abundant, interesting life—all manner of sea birds, black rabbits running among the rocks, seals swimming in the silent bays. Then the patch of civilisation under shelter of the hills; the yellow corn-fields; the dots of human creatures and the red and tawny-grey cattle visible afar in the meadow; the solitary house; the soft foliage of trees and bushes; the wild-flowers along the cliffs. That is the green-shored island: that is the *Ool-a-va* of the sailors; we know it only in sunlight and among blue summer seas: it shines for us for ever!

The people who go yachting are a fickle folk. The scene changes—and their interests change—every few

minutes. Now it is the swooping down of a solan; again it is the appearance of another island far away; presently it is a shout of laughter forward, as some unlucky wight gets drowned in a shower of sea-spray: anything catches their attention for the moment. And so the *White Dove* swings along; and the sea gets heavier and heavier; and we watch the breakers springing high over the black rocks of Colonsay. It is the Laird who is now instructing our new guest; pointing out to him, as they come in view, Staffa, the Dutchman, Fladda, and Lunga, and Cairnaburg. Tiree is invisible at the horizon: there is too wild a whirl of wind and water.

The gloom behind us increases; we know not what is about to happen to our beloved but now distant Ulva—what sudden rumble of thunder is about to startle the silence of the dark Loch-na-Keal. But ahead of us the south is still shining clear: blow, winds, that we may gain the quiet shelter of Polterriv before the evening falls! And is it not full moon to-night?—to-night our new guest may see the yellow moon shining on the still waters of Iona Sound.

But the humiliating truth must be told. The heavy sea has been trying to one unaccustomed to life on board. Howard Smith, though answering questions well enough, and even joining voluntarily in conversation occasionally, wears a preoccupied air. He does not take much interest in the caves of Bourg. The bright look has gone from his face.

His gentle hostess—who has herself had moments of gloom on the bosom of the deep—recognises these signs instantly; and insists on immediate luncheon. There is a double reason for this haste. We can now run under the lee of the Erisgeir rocks, where there will be less danger to Master Fred's plates and tumblers. So we are all bundled down into the saloon; the swell sensibly subsides as we get to leeward of Erisgier; there is a scramble of helping and handing;

and another explosion in the galley tells us that Master Fred has not yet mastered the art of releasing effervescing fluids. Half a tumblerful of that liquid puts new life into our solemn friend. The colour returns to his face, and brightness to his eyes. He admits that he was beginning to long for a few minutes on firm land—but now—but now—he is even willing to join us in an excursion that has been talked of to the far Dubhartach lighthouse.

"But we must really wait for Angus," our hostess says, "before going out there. He was always so anxious to go to Dubhartach."

"But surely you won't ask him to come away from his duties again?" Mary Avon puts in hastily. "You know he ought to go back to London at once."

"I know I have written him a letter," says the other demurely. "You can read it if you like, Mary. It is in pencil, for I was afraid of the ink-bottle going waltzing over the table."

Miss Avon would not read the letter. She said we must be past Erisgeir by this time; and proposed we should go on deck. This we did; and the Youth was now so comfortable and assured in his mind that, by lying full length on the deck, close to the weather bulwarks, he managed to light a cigar. He smoked there in much content, almost safe from the spray.

Mary Avon was seated at the top of the companion, reading. Her hostess came and squeezed herself in beside her, and put her arm round her.

"Mary," said she, "why don't you want Angus Sutherland to come back to the yacht?"

"I!" said she, in great surprise—though she did not meet the look of the elder woman—"I—I—don't you see yourself that he ought to go back to London? How can he look after that magazine while he is away in the Highlands? And—and—he has so much to look forward to—so much to do—that you should not encourage him in making light of his work."

"Making light of his work!" said the other. "I am almost sure that you yourself told him that he deserved and required a long—a very long—holiday."

"You did, certainly."

"And didn't you?"

The young lady looked rather embarrassed.

"When you saw him," said she, with flushed cheeks, "so greatly enjoying the sailing—absorbed in it—and —and gaining health and strength, too—well, of course you naturally wished that he should come back and go away with you again. But it is different on reflection. You should not ask him."

"Why, what evil is likely to happen to him through taking another six weeks' holiday? Is he likely to fall out of the race of life because of a sail in the *White Dove?* And doesn't he know his own business? He is not a child."

"He would do a great deal to please you."

"I want him to please himself," said the other; and she added, with a deadly frown gathering on her forehead, "and I won't have you, Miss Dignity, interfering with the pleasures of my guests. And there is to be no snubbing, and no grim looks, and no hints about work, and London, and other nonsense, when Angus Sutherland comes back to us. You shall stand by the gangway—do you hear?—and receive him with a smiling face; and if you are not particularly kind, and civil, and attentive to him, I'll have you lashed to the yard-arm and painted blue—keel-haul me if I don't."

Fairer and fairer grew the scene around us as the brave *White Dove* went breasting the heavy Atlantic rollers. Blue and white overhead; the hot sunlight doing its best to dry the dripping decks; Iona shining there over the smoother waters of the Sound; the sea breaking white, and spouting up in columns, as it dashed against the pale red promontories of the Ross of Mull. But then this stiff breeze had backed to the

west; and there was many a long tack to be got over before we left behind the Atlantic swell and ran clear into the Sound. The evening was drawing on apace as we slowly and cautiously steered into the little creek of Polterriv. No sooner had the anchor rattled out than we heard the clear tinkling of Master Fred's bell; how on earth had he managed to cook dinner amid all that diving and rolling and pitching?

And then, as we had hoped, it was a beautiful evening; and the long gig was got out, and shawls for the women-folk flung into the stern. The fishing did not claim our attention. Familiar as some of us were with the wonderful twilights of the north, which of us had ever seen anything more solemn, and still, and lovely than these colours of sea and shore? Half-past nine at night on the 8th of August; and still the west and north were flushed with a pale rose-red, behind the dark, rich, olive-green of the shadowed Iona. But what was that to the magic world that lay before us as we returned to the yacht? Now the moon had arisen, and it seemed to be of a clear, lambent gold; and the cloudless heavens and the still sea were of a violet hue—not imaginatively, or relatively, but positively and literally violet. Then between the violet-coloured sky and the violet-coloured sea, a long line of rock, jet black as it appeared to us. That was all the picture: the yellow moon, the violet sky, the violet sea, the line of black rock. No doubt it was the intensity of the shadows along this line of rock that gave that extraordinary luminousness to the still heavens and the still sea.

When we got back to the yacht a telegram awaited us. It had been sent to Bunessan, the nearest telegraph-station; but some kind friends there, recognising the *White Dove* as she came along by Erisgeir, and shrewdly concluding that we must pass the night at Polterriv, had been so kind as to forward it on to Fion-phort by a messenger.

"I thought so!" says Queen T. with a fine delight in her face as she reads the telegram. "It is from Angus. He is coming on Thursday. We must go back to meet him at Ballahulish or Corpach."

Then the discourtesy of this remark struck her.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Smith," said she, instantly. "Of course, I mean if it is quite agreeable to you. He does not expect us, you see; he would come on here——"

"I asure you I would as soon go to Ballahulish as anywhere else," says the Youth promptly. "It is quite the same to me—it is all new, you see, and all equally charming."

Mary Avon alone expressed no delight at this prospect of our going to Ballahulish to meet Angus Sutherland; she sate silent; her eyes were thoughtful and distant; it was not of anything around her that she was thinking.

The moon had got whiter now; the sea and the sky blue-black in place of that soft warm violet colour. We sate on deck till a late hour; the world was asleep around us; not a sound disturbed the absolute stillness of land and sea.

And where was the voice of our singing bird? Had the loss of a mere sum of money made her forget all about Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton, "and Mary Carmichael and me"? Or was the midnight silence too much for her; and the thought of the dusky cathedral over there; with the gravestones pale in the moonlight; and all around a whispering of the lonely sea? She had nothing to fear. She might have crossed over to Iona and might have walked all by herself through the ruins, and in calmness regarded the sculptured stones. The dead sleep sound.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SECRET SCHEMES.

THE delight with which John of Skye heard that his friend Dr. Sutherland was coming back to the yacht, and that we were now setting out for Ballahulish or Corpach to meet him, found instant and practical expression on this fine, breezy, sunlit morning.

"Hector," says he, "we will put the gaff topsail on her!"

What did he care though this squally breeze came blowing down the Sound in awkward gusts?

"It is a fine wind, mem," says he to the Admiral, as we slowly leave the green waters and the pink rocks of Polterriv, and get into the open and breezy channel. "Oh, we will mek a good run the day. And I beg your pardon, mem, but it is a great pleasure to me that Mr. Sutherland himself is coming back to the yat."

"He understands your clever sailing, John: is that it?"

"He knows more about a yat as any chentleman I will ever see, mem. And we will try to get a good breeze for him this time, mem—and not to have the calm weather."

This is not likely to be a day of calm weather, at all events. Tide and wind together take us away swiftly from the little harbour behind the granite rocks. And is Iona over there all asleep; or are there some friends in the small village watching the *White Dove* bearing away to the south? We wave our handkerchiefs on chance. We take a last look at the gabled ruins over the sea; at the green corn-fields; and the scattered houses; and the beaches of silver sand. Good-bye—good-bye! It is a last look for this summer at least;

perhaps it is a last look for ever. But Iona too—as well as Ulva—remains in the memory a vision of sunlight, and smooth seas, and summer days.

Harder and harder blows this fresh breeze from the north; and we are racing down the Sound with the driven waves. But for the rope round the tiller, Miss Avon, who is steering, would find it difficult to keep her feet; and her hair is blown all about her face. The salt water comes swishing down the scuppers; the churned foam goes hissing and boiling away from the sides of the vessel; the broad Atlantic widens out. And that small grey thing at the horizon? Can that speck be a mass of masonry a hundred and fifty feet in height, wedged into the lonely rock?

"No, no," says our gentle Queen Titania with an involuntary shudder, "not for worlds would I climb up that iron ladder, with the sea and the rocks right below me. I should never get half-way up."

"They will put a rope round your waist, if you like," it is pointed out to her.

"When we go out, then," says this coward, "I will see how Mary gets on. If she does not die of fright, I may venture."

"Oh, but I don't think I shall be with you," remarks the young lady quite simply.

At this there is a general stare.

"I don't know what you mean," says her hostess, with an ominous curtness.

"Why, you know," says the girl, cheerfully—and disengaging one hand to get her hair out of her eyes —"I can't afford to go idling much longer. I must get back to London."

"Don't talk nonsense," says the other woman, angrily. "You may try to stop other people's holidays, if you like; but I am going to look after yours. Holidays! How are you to work, if you don't work now? Will you find many landscapes in Regent Street?"

"I have a great many sketches," says Mary Avon, "and I must try to make something out of them, where there is less distraction of amusement. And really, you know, you have so many friends—would you like me to become a fixture—like the mainmast—"

"I would like you to talk a little common sense," is the sharp reply. "You are not going back to London till the *White Dove* is laid up for the winter—that is what I know."

"I am afraid I must ask you to let me off," she says, quite simply and seriously. "Suppose I go up to London next week? Then, if I get on pretty well, I may come back——"

"You may come back!" says the other with a fine contempt. "Don't try to impose on me. I am an older woman than you. And I have enough provocations and worries from other quarters: I don't want you to begin and bother."

"Is your life so full of trouble?" says the girl, innocently. "What are these fearful provocations?"

"Never mind. You will find out in time. But when you get married, Mary, don't forget to buy a copy of Doddridge on Patience. That should be included in every bridal trousseau."

"Poor thing—is it so awfully ill-used?" replies the steersman, with much compassion.

Here John of Skye comes forward.

"If ye please, mem, I will tek the tiller until we get round the Ross. The rocks are very bad here."

"All right, John," says the young lady; and then, with much cautious clinging to various objects, she goes below, saying that she means to do a little more to a certain slight water-colour sketch of Polterriv. We know why she wants to put some further work on that hasty production. Yesterday the Laird expressed high approval of the sketch. She means him to take it with him to Denny-mains, when she leaves for London.

But this heavy sea: how is the artist getting on with her work amid such pitching and diving? Now that we are round the Ross, the *White Dove* has shifted her course; the wind is more on her beam; the mainsheet has been hauled in; and the noble ship goes ploughing along in splendid style; but how about water-colour drawing?

Suddenly, as the yacht gives a heavy lurch to leeward, an awful sound is heard below. Queen T. clambers down the companion, and holds on by the door of the saloon; the others following and looking over her shoulders. There a fearful scene appears. At the head of the table, in the regal recess usually occupied by the carver and chief president of our banquets, sits Mary Avon, in mute and blank despair. Everything has disappeared from before her. A tumbler rolls backwards and forwards on the floor, empty. A dishevelled bundle of paper, hanging on to the edge of a carpet-stool, represents what was once an orderly sketch-book. Tubes, pencils, saucers, sponges—all have gone with the table-cloth. And the artist sits quite hopeless and silent, staring before her like a maniac in a cell.

"Whatever have you been and done?" calls her hostess.

There is no answer: only that tragic despair.

"It was all bad steering," remarks the Youth. "I knew it would happen as soon as Miss Avon left the helm."

But the Laird, not confining his sympathy to words, presses by his hostess; and, holding hard by the bare table, staggers along to the scene of the wreck. The others timidly follow. One by one the various objects are rescued, and placed for safety on the couch on the leeward side of the saloon. Then the automaton in the presidential chair begins to move. She recovers her powers of speech. She says—awaking from her dream—

"Is my head on?"

"And if it is, it is not of much use to you," says her hostess, angrily. "Whatever made you have those things out in a sea like this? Come up on deck at once; and let Fred get luncheon ready."

The maniac only laughs.

"Luncheon!" she says. "Luncheon in the middle of earthquakes!"

But this sneer at the *White Dove*, because she has no swinging table, is ungenerous. Besides, is not our Friedrich d'or able to battle any pitching with his ingeniously bolstered couch—so that bottles, glasses, plates, and what not, are as safe as they would be in a case in the British Museum? A luncheon party on board the *White Dove*, when there is a heavy Atlantic swell running, is not an imposing ceremony. It would not look well as a coloured lithograph in the illustrated papers. The figures crouching on the low stools to leeward; the narrow cushion bolstered up so that the most enterprising of dishes cannot slide; the table-cover plaited so as to afford receptacles for knives and spoons; bottles and tumblers plunged into hollows and propped; Master Fred, balancing himself behind these stooping figures, bottle in hand, and ready to replenish any cautiously proffered wine-glass. But it serves. And Dr. Sutherland has assured us that, the heavier the sea, the more necessary is luncheon for the weaker vessels, who may be timid about the effect of so much rolling and pitching. When we get on deck again, who is afraid? It is all a question as to what signal may be visible to the white house of Carsaig—shining afar there in the sunlight, among the hanging woods, and under the soft purple of the hills. Behold! —behold!—the red flag run up to the top of the white pole! Is it a message to us, or only a summons to the *Pioneer?* For now, through the whirl of wind and spray, we can make out the steamer that daily encircles Mull, bringing with it white loaves, and newspapers, and other luxuries of the mainland.

She comes nearer and nearer; the throbbing of the paddles is heard among the rush of the waves; the people crowd to the side of the boat to have a look at the passing yacht; and one well-known figure, standing on the hurricane deck, raises his gilt-braided cap, —for we happen to have on board a gentle small creature who is a great friend of his. And she waves her white handkerchief, of course; and you should see what a fluttering of similar tokens there is all along the steamer's decks, and on the paddle-boxes. Farewell! —farewell!—may you have a smooth landing at Staffa, and a pleasant sail down the Sound, in the quiet of the afternoon!

The day wears on, with puffs and squalls coming tearing over from the high cliffs of southern Mull; and still the gallant *White Dove* meets and breasts those rolling waves, and sends the spray flying from her bows. We have passed Loch Buy; Garveloch and the Island of Saints are drawing nearer; soon we shall have to bend our course northward, when we have got by Eilean-straid-ean. And whether it is that Mary Avon is secretly comforting herself with the notion that she will soon see her friends in London again, or whether it is that she is proud of being again promoted to the tiller, she has quite recovered her spirits. We hear our singing-bird once more—though it is difficult, amid the rush and swirl of the waters, to do more than catch chance phrases and refrains. And then she is being very merry with the Laird, who is humorously decrying England and the English, and proving to her that it is the Scotch migration to the south that is the very saving of her native country.

"The Lord Chief Justice of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the President of the Royal Academy—the heads and leading men everywhere—all Scotch—all Scotch," says he.

"But the weak point about the Scotch, sir," says this philosopher in the ulster, who is clinging on to

the tiller rope, "is their modesty. They are so distrustful of their own merits. And they are always running down their own country."

"Ha, ha!—ho! ho! ho!" roars the Laird. "Verra good! verra good! I owe ye one for that. I owe ye one. Howard, have ye nothing to say in defence of your native country?"

"You are speaking of Scotland, sir?"

"Ay."

"That is not my native country, you know."

"It was your mother's, then."

Somehow, when by some accident—and it but rarely happened—the Laird mentioned Howard Smith's mother, a brief silence fell on him. It lasted but a second or two. Presently he was saying, with much cheerfulness—

"No, no, I am not one of those that would promote any rivalry between Scotland and England. We are one country now. If the Scotch preserve the best leeterary English—the most pithy and characteristic forms of the language—the English that is talked in the south is the most generally received throughout the world. I have even gone the length—I'm no ashamed to admit it—of hinting to Tom Galbraith that he should exheebit more in London: the influence of such work as his should not be confined to Edinburgh. And jealous as they may be in the south of the Scotch school, they could not refuse to recognise its excellence—eh? No, no; when Galbraith likes to exheebit in London, ye'll hear a stir, I'm thinking. The jealousy of English artists will have no effect on public opeenion. They may keep him out o' the Academy—there's many a good artist has never been within the walls—but the public is the judge. I am told that when his picture of *Stonebyres Falls* was exheebited in Edinburgh, a dealer came all the way from London to look at it."

"Did he buy it?" asked Miss Avon, gently.

"Buy it!" the Laird said, with a contemptuous laugh. "There are some of us about Glasgow who know better than to let a picture like that get to London. I bought it myself. Ye'll see it when ye come to Denny-mains. Ye have heard of it, no doubt?"

"N—no, I think not," she timidly answers.

"No matter—no matter. Ye'll see it when ye come to Denny-mains."

He seemed to take it for granted that she was going to pay a visit to Denny-mains: had he not heard, then, of her intention of at once returning to London?

Once well round into the Frith of Lorn, the wind that had borne us down the Sound of Iona was now right ahead; and our progress was but slow. As the evening wore on, it was proposed that we should run into Loch Speliv for the night. There was no dissentient voice.

The sudden change from the plunging seas without to the quiet waters of the solitary little loch was strange enough. And then, as we slowly beat up against the northerly wind to the head of the loch—a beautiful, quiet, sheltered little cup of a harbour among the hills—we found before us, or rather over us, the splendours of a stormy sunset among the mountains above Glen More. It was a striking spectacle—the vast and silent gloom of the valleys below, which were of a cold and intense green in the shadow; then above, among the great shoulders and peaks of the hills, flashing gleams of golden light, and long swathes of purple cloud touched with scarlet along their edges, and mists of rain that came along with the wind, blotting out here and there those splendid colours. There was an absolute silence in this overshadowed bay—but for the cry of the startled wild-fowl. There was no sign of any habitation, except perhaps a trace of pale blue smoke rising from behind a mass of trees. Away went the anchor with a short, sharp rattle; we were safe for the night.

We knew, however, what that trace of smoke indicated behind the dark trees. By and by, as soon as the gig had got to the land, there was a procession along the solitary shore—in the wan twilight—and up the rough path—and through the scattered patches of birch and fir. And were you startled, Madam, by the apparition of people who were so inconsiderate as to knock at your door in the middle of dinner, and whose eyes, grown accustomed to the shadows of the valleys of Mull, must have looked bewildered enough on meeting the glare of the lamps? And what did you think of a particular pair of eyes—very soft and gentle in their dark lustre—appealing, timid, friendly eyes, that had nevertheless a quiet happiness and humour in them? It was at all events most kind of you to tell the young lady that her notion of throwing up her holiday and setting out for London was mere midsummer madness. How could you—or any one else—guess at the origin of so strange a wish?

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEFORE BREAKFAST.

WHO is this who slips through the saloon, while as yet all on board are asleep—who noiselessly ascends the companion-way, and then finds herself alone on deck? And all the world around her is asleep too, though the gold and rose of the new day is shining along the eastern heavens. There is not a sound in this silent little loch: the shores and the woods are as still as the far peaks of the mountains, where the mists are touched here and there with a dusky fire.

She is not afraid to be alone in this silent world. There is a bright and contented look on her face.

Carefully and quietly, so as not to disturb the people below, she gets a couple of deck stools, and puts down the large sketch-book from under her arm, and opens out a certain leather case. But do not think she is going to attack that blaze of colour in the east, with the reflected glare on the water, and the bar of dark land between. She knows better. She has a wholesome fear of chromo-lithographs. She turns rather to those great mountain masses, with their mysteriously moving clouds, and their shoulders touched here and there with a sombre red, and their deep and silent glens a cold, intense green in shadow. There is more workable material.

And after all there is no ambitious effort to trouble her. It is only a rough jotting of form and colour, for future use. It is a pleasant occupation for this still, cool, beautiful morning; and perhaps she is fairly well satisfied with it, for one listening intently might catch snatches of songs and airs—of a somewhat incoherent and inappropriate character. For what have the praises of Bonny Black Bess to do with sunrise in Loch Speliv? Or the saucy Arethusa either? But all the same the work goes quietly and dexterously on—no wild dashes and searchings for theatrical effect, but a patient mosaic of touches precisely reaching their end. She does not want to bewilder the world. She wants to have trustworthy records for her own use. And she seems content with the progress she is making.

Here's a health to the girls that we loved long ago,

this is the last air into which she has wandered—half humming and half whistling—

Where the Shannon, and Liffey, and Blackwater flow.

—when she suddenly stops her work to listen. Can any one be up already? The noise is not repeated; and she proceeds with her work.

Here's a health to old Ireland: may she ne'er be dismayed;
Then pale grew the cheeks of the Irish Brigade!

The clouds are assuming substance now: they are no mere flat washes but accurately drawn objects that have their fore-shortening like anything else. And if Miss Avon may be vaguely conscious that had our young Doctor been on board she would not have been left so long alone, that had nothing to do with her work. The mornings on which he used to join her on deck, and chat to her while she painted, seem far away now. He and she together would see Dunvegan no more.

But who is this who most cautiously comes up the companion, bearing in his hand a cup and saucer?

"Miss Avon," says he, with a bright laugh, "here is the first cup of tea I ever made; are you afraid to try it?"

"Oh, dear me," said she, penitently, "did I make any noise in getting my things below?"

"Well," he says, "I thought I heard you; and I knew what you would be after; and I got up and lit the spirit-lamp."

"Oh, it is so very kind of you," she says—for it is really a pretty little attention on the part of one who is not much given to shifting for himself on board.

Then he dives below again and fetches her up some biscuits.

"By Jove," he says, coming closer to the sketch, "that is very good. That is awfully good. Do you mean to say you have done all that this morning?"

"Oh, yes," she says, modestly. "It is only a sketch."

"I think it uncommonly good," he says, staring at it as if he would pierce the paper.

Then there is a brief silence, during which Miss Avon boldly adventures upon this amateur's tea.

"I beg your pardon," he says, after a bit, "it is

none of my business, you know—but you don't really mean that you are going back to London?"

"If I am allowed," she answers with a smile.

"I am sure you will disappoint your friends most awfully," says he, in quite an earnest manner. "I know they had quite made up their minds you were to stay the whole time. It would be very unfair of you. And my uncle: he would break his heart if you were to go."

"They are all very kind to me," was her only answer.

"Look here," he says, with a most friendly anxiety. "If—if—it is only about business—about pictures I mean—I really beg your pardon for intermeddling—"

"Oh," said she, frankly, "there is no secret about it. In fact, I want everybody to know that I am anxious to sell my pictures. You see, as I have got to earn my own living, shouldn't I begin at once and find out what it is like?"

"But look here," he said eagerly, "if it is a question of selling pictures, you should trust to my uncle. He is among a lot of men in the West of Scotland, rich merchants and people of that sort, who haven't inherited collections of pictures, and whose hobby is to make a collection for themselves. And they have much too good sense to buy spurious old masters, or bad examples for the sake of the name: they prefer good modern art, and I can tell you they are prepared to pay for it too. And they are not fools, mind you; they know good pictures. You may think my uncle is very prejudiced—he has his favourite artists—and —and believes in Tom Galbraith, don't you know—but I can assure you, you won't find many men who know more about a good landscape than he does; and you would say so if you saw his dining-room at Denny-mains."

"I quite believe that," said she, beginning to put up her materials: she had done her morning's work.

"Well," he says, "you trust to him; there are lots of those Glasgow men who would only be too glad to have the chance——"

"Oh, no, no," she cried, laughing. "I am not going to coerce people into buying my pictures for the sake of friendship. I think your uncle would buy every sketch I have on board the yacht; but I cannot allow my friends to be victimised."

"Oh, victimised!" said he, scornfully. "They ought to be glad to have the chance. And do you mean to go on giving away your work for nothing? That sketch of the little creek we were in—opposite Iona, don't you know—that you gave my uncle, is charming. And they tell me you have given that picture of the rocks and sea-birds—where is the place?——"

"Oh, do you mean the sketch in the saloon—of Canna?"

"Yes; why it is one of the finest landscapes I ever saw. And they tell me you gave it to that doctor who was on board!"

"Dr. Sutherland," says she, hastily—and there is a quick colour in her face—"seemed to like it as—as a sort of reminiscence, you know——"

"But he should not have accepted a valuable picture," said the Youth, with decision. "No doubt you offered it to him when you saw he admired it. But now—when he must understand that—well, in fact, that circumstances are altered—he will have the good sense to give it you back again."

"Oh, I hope not," she says, with her embarrassment not diminishing. "I—I should not like that! I—I should be vexed."

"A person of good tact and good taste," says this venturesome young man, "would make a joke of it—would insist that you never meant it—and would prefer to buy the picture."

She answers, somewhat shortly—

"I think not. I think Dr. Sutherland has as good taste as any one. He would know that that would vex me very much."

"Oh, well," says he, with a sort of carelessness, "every one to his liking. If he cares to accept so valuable a present, good and well."

"You don't suppose he asked me for it?" she says, rather warmly. "I gave it him. He would have been rude to have refused it. I was very much pleased that he cared for the picture."

"Oh, he is a judge of art, also? I am told he knows everything."

"He was kind enough to say he liked the sketch; that was enough for me."

"He is very lucky; that is all I have to say."

"I dare say he has forgotten all about such a trifle. He has more important things to think about."

"Well," said he, with a good-natured laugh, "I should not consider such a picture a trifle if any one presented it to me. But it is always the people who get everything they want who value things least."

"Do you think Dr. Sutherland such a fortunate person?" says she. "Well, he is fortunate in having great abilities; and he is fortunate in having chosen a profession that has already secured him great honour, and that promises a splendid future to him. But that is the result of hard work; and he has to work hard now. I don't think most men would like to change places with him just at present."

"He has one good friend and champion, at all events," he says, with a pleasant smile.

"Oh," says she, hastily and anxiously, "I am saying what I hear. My acquaintance with Dr. Sutherland is —is quite recent, I may say; though I have met him in London. I only got to know something about him when he was in Edinburgh, and I happened to be there too."

"He is coming back to the yacht," observes Mr. Smith.

"He will be foolish to think of it," she answers, simply.

At this stage the yacht begins to wake up. The head of Hector of Moidart, much dishevelled, appears at the forecastle, and that wiry mariner is rubbing his eyes; but no sooner does he perceive that one of the ladies is on deck than he suddenly ducks down again —to get his face washed, and his paper collar. Then there is a voice heard in the saloon calling:—

"Who has left my spirit-lamp burning?"

"Oh, good gracious!" says the Youth, and tumbles down the companion incontinently.

Then the Laird appears, bringing up with him a huge red volume entitled *Municipal London;* but no sooner does he find that Miss Avon is on deck than he puts aside that mighty compendium, and will have her walk up and down with him before breakfast.

"What?" he says, eyeing the cup and saucer, "have ye had your breakfast already?"

"Mr. Smith was so kind as to bring me a cup of tea."

"What," he says again—and he is obviously greatly delighted. "Of his own making? I did not think he had as much gumption."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said she. She had been startled by the whistling of a curlew close by, and had not heard him distinctly.

"I said he was a smart lad," said the Laird, unblushingly. "Oh, ay, a good lad; ye will not find many better lads than Howard. Will I tell ye a secret?"

"Well, sir—if you like," said she.

There was a mysterious, but humorous look about the Laird; and he spoke in a whisper.

"It is not good sometimes for young folk to know what is in store for them. But I mean to give him

Denny-mains. Whish! Not a word. I'll surprise him some day."

"He ought to be very grateful to you, sir," was her answer.

"That he is—that he is," said the Laird; "he's an obedient lad. And I should not wonder if he had Denny-mains long before he expects it; though I must have my crust of bread, ye know. It would be a fine occupation for him, looking after the estate; and what is the use of his living in London, and swallowing smoke and fog? I can assure ye that the air at Denny-mains, though it's no far from Glasgow, is as pure as it is in this very Loch Speliv."

"Oh, indeed, sir."

They had another couple of turns in silence.

"Ye're verra fond of sailing," says the Laird.

"I am now," she says. "But I was very much afraid before I came; I have suffered so terribly in crossing the Channel. Somehow one never thinks of being ill here—with nice clean cabins—and no engines throbbing——"

"I meant that ye like well enough to go sailing about these places?"

"Oh yes," says she. "When shall I ever have such a beautiful holiday again?"

The Laird laughed a little to himself. Then he said with a business-like air:

"I have been thinking that, when my nephew came to Denny-mains, I would buy a yacht for him, that he could keep down the Clyde somewhere—at Gourock, or Kilmun, or Dunoon, maybe. It is a splendid ground for yachting—a splendid! Ye have never been through the Kyles of Bute?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have been through them in the steamer."

"Ay, but a yacht; wouldn't that be better? And I am no sure I would not advise him to have a steam-yacht—ye are so much more independent of wind and

tide; and I'm thinking ye could get a verra good little steam-yacht for 3,000*l.*"

"Oh, indeed."

"A great deal depends on the steward," he continues, seriously. "A good steward that does not touch drink, is jist worth anything. If I could get a first-class man, I would not mind giving him two pounds a week, with his clothes and his keep, while the yacht was being used; and I would not let him away in the winter—no, no. Ye could employ him at Denny-mains, as a butler-creature, or something like that."

She did not notice the peculiarity of the little pronoun: if she had, how could she have imagined that the Laird was really addressing himself to her?

"I have none but weeman-servants indoors at Denny-mains," he continued, "but when Howard comes, I would prefer him to keep the house like other people, and I will not stint him as to means. Have I told ye what Welliam Dunbaur says—

Be merry, man, and tak not sair in mind——"

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"There's fine common sense in that. And do not you believe the people who tell ye that the Scotch are a dour people, steeped in Calvinism, and niggardly and grasping at the last farthing——"

"I have found them exceedingly kind to me, and warm-hearted and generous——" says she; but he interrupted her suddenly.

"I'll tell ye what I'll do," said he, with decision. "When I buy that yacht, I'll get Tom Galbraith to paint every panel in the saloon—no matter what it costs!"

"Your nephew will be very proud of it," she said.

"And I would expect to take a trip in her myself occasionally," he added, in a facetious manner. "I would expect to be invited——"

"Surely, sir, you cannot expect your nephew to be so ungrateful——"

"Oh," he said, "I only expect reasonable things. Young people are young people; they cannot like to be always hampered by grumbling old fogeys. No, no; if I present any one wi' a yacht, I do not look on myself as a piece of its furniture."

The Laird seemed greatly delighted. His step on the deck was firmer. In the pauses of the conversation she heard something about—

tántará! Sing tántará!

"Will ye take your maid with ye?" he asked of her, abruptly.

The girl looked up with a bewildered air—perhaps with a trifle of alarm in her eyes.

"I, sir?"

"Ha, ha!" said he, laughing, "I forgot. Ye have not been invited yet. No more have I. But—if the yacht were ready—and—and if ye were going—ye would take your maid, no doubt, for comfort's sake?"

The girl looked reassured. She said, cheerfully:

"Well, sir, I don't suppose I shall ever go yachting again, after I leave the *White Dove*. And if I were, I don't suppose I should be able to afford to have a maid with me, unless the dealers in London should suddenly begin to pay me a good deal more than they have done hitherto."

At this point she was summoned below by her hostess calling. The Laird was left alone on deck. He continued to pace up and down, muttering to himself, with a proud look on his face.

"A landscape in every panel, as I'm a living man! . . . Tom'll do it well, when I tell him who it's for. . . . The leddies' cabin blue and silver—cool in the summer—the skylight pented—she'll no be saying that the Scotch are wanting in taste when she sees that cabin!

Sing tántará ! Sing tántará !
* * * *The Highland army rues*
That e'er they came to Cromdale !

And her maid—if she will not be able to afford a maid, who will?—French, if she likes! Blue and silver—blue and silver—that's it!"

And then the Laird, still humming his lugubrious battle-song, comes down into the saloon.

"Good morning, ma'am; good morning! Breakfast ready? I'm just ravenous. That wild lassie has walked me up and down until I am like to faint. A beautiful morning again—splendid!—splendid! And do ye know where ye will be this day next year?"

"I am sure I don't," says his hostess, busy with the breakfast-things.

"I will tell ye. Anchored in the Holy Loch, off Kilmun, in a screw-yacht. Mark my words now: *this very day next year!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

A PROTECTOR.

"Oh, ay," says John of Skye, quite proudly, as we go on deck after breakfast, "there will be no more o' the dead calms. We will give Mr. Sutherland a good breeze or two when he comes back to the yat."

It is all Mr. Sutherland and Mr. Sutherland now!—everything is to be done because Mr. Sutherland is coming. Each belaying pin is polished so that one might see to shave in it; Hector of Moidart has spent about two hours in scraping and rubbing the brass and copper of the galley stove-pipe; and Captain John, with many grins and apologies, has got Miss Avon to sew up a rent that has begun to appear in the red

ensign. All that he wants now is to have the yacht beached for a couple of days, to have the long slender sea-grass scraped from her hull: then Mr. Sutherland will see how the *White Dove* will sail!

"I should imagine," says the Youth, in an undertone, to his hostess, as we are working out the narrow entrance to Loch Speliv, "that your doctor-friend must have given those men a liberal *pour-boire* when he left."

"Oh, I am sure not," said she, quickly, as if that was a serious imputation. "That is very unlikely."

"They seem very anxious to have everything put right against his coming," he says; "at all events, your captain seems to think that every good breeze he gets is merely thrown away on us."

"Dr. Sutherland and he," she says, laughing, "were very good friends. And then Angus had very bad luck when he was on board: the glass wouldn't fall. But I have promised to bottle up the equinoctials for him—he will have plenty of winds before we have done with him. You must stay too, you know, Mr. Smith, and see how the *White Dove* rides out a gale."

He regarded her—with some suspicion. He was beginning to know that this lady's speech—despite the great gentleness and innocence of her eyes—sometimes concealed curious meanings. And was she now merely giving him a kind and generous invitation to go yachting with us for another month; or was she, with a cruel sarcasm, referring to the probability of his having to remain a prisoner for that time, in order to please his uncle?

However, the conversation had to be dropped, for at this moment the Laird and his *protégée* made their appearance; and, of course, a deck-chair had to be brought for her, and a foot-stool, and a sunshade, and a book. But what were these attentions, on the part of her elderly slave, compared with the fact that a young man, presumably enjoying a sound and healthy

sleep, should have unselfishly got up at an unholy hour of the morning, and should have risked blowing up the yacht with spirits of wine in order to get her a cup of tea?

It was a fine sailing day. Running before a light topsail breeze from the south-east, the *White Dove* was making for the Lynn of Morven, and bringing us more and more within view of the splendid circle of mountains, from Ben Cruachan in the east to Ben Nevis in the north; from Ben Nevis down to the successive waves of the Morven hills. And we knew why, among all the sunlit yellows and greens—faint as they were in the distance—there were here and there on slope and shoulder stains of a beautiful rose-purple that were a new feature in the landscape. The heather was coming into bloom—the knee-deep, honey-scented heather, the haunt of the snipe, and the muircock, and the mountain hare. And if there was to be for us this year no toiling over the high slopes and crags—looking down from time to time on a spacious world of sunlit sea and island—we were not averse from receiving friendly and substantial messages from those altitudes. In a day or two now the first crack of the breechloader would startle the silence of the morning air. And Master Fred's larder was sorely in want of variety.

Northward, and still northward, the light breeze tempering the scorching sunlight that glares on the sails and the deck. Each long ripple of the running blue sea flashes in diamonds; and when we look to the south, those silver lines converge and converge, until at the horizon they become a solid blaze of light unendurable to the eye. But it is to the north we turn —to the land of Appin, and Kingairloch, and Lochaber: blow, light wind; and carry us onward, gentle tide; we have an appointment to keep within shadow of the mountains that guard Glencoe.

The Laird has discovered that these two were up early this morning: he becomes facetious.

"Not sleepy yet, Miss Mary?" he says.

"Oh, no—not at all," she says, looking up from her book.

"It's the early bird that catches the first sketch. Fine and healthy is that early rising, Howard. I'm thinking ye did not sleep sound last night: what for were ye up before anybody was stirring?"

But the Laird does not give him time to answer. Something has tickled the fancy of this profound humourist.

"*Kee! kee!*" he laughs; and he rubs his hands. "I mind a good one I heard from Tom Galbraith, when he and I were at the Bridge of Allan; room to room, ye know; and Tom did snore that night. 'What,' said I to him in the morning, 'had ye nightmare, or *delirium tremens*, that ye made such a noise in the night?' 'Did I snore?' said he—I'm thinking somebody else must have complained before. 'Snore?' said I, 'twenty grampuses was nothing to it.' And Tom—he burst out a-laughing. 'I'm very glad,' says he. 'If I snored, I must have had a sound sleep!' A *sound* sleep—d'ye see? Very sharp—very smart—eh?"—and the Laird laughed and chuckled over that portentous joke.

"Oh, uncle, uncle, uncle!" his nephew cried. "You used never to do such things. You must quit the society of those artists, if they have such a corrupting influence on you."

"I tell ye," he says, with a sudden seriousness, "I would just like to show Tom Galbraith that picture o' Canna that's below. No; I would not ask him to alter a thing. Very good—very good it is. And—and I think—I will admit it—for a plain man likes the truth to be told—there is just a bit jealousy among them against any English person that tries to paint Scotch scenery. No, no, Miss Mary—don't you be afraid. Ye can hold your own. If I had that picture, now—if it belonged to me—and if Tom was stopping wi' me at

Denny-mains, I would not allow him to alter it, not if he offered to spend a week's work on it."

After that—what? The Laird could say no more.

Alas! alas! our wish to take a new route northward was all very well: but we had got under the lee of Lismore, and slowly and slowly the wind died away, until even the sea was as smooth as the surface of a mirror. It was but little compensation that we could lean over the side of the yacht, and watch the thousands of "sea-blubbers" far down in the water, in all their hues of blue, and purple, and pale pink. The heat of the sun was blistering; scorching with a sharp pain any nose or cheek that was inadvertently turned towards it. As for the Laird, he could not stand this oven-like business any longer; he declared the saloon was ever so much cooler than the deck; and went down below, and lay at length on one of the long blue cushions.

"Why, John," says Queen T., "you are bringing on those dead calms again. What will Dr. Sutherland say to you?"

But John of Skye has his eye on the distant shore.

"Oh, no, mem," he says, with a crafty smile, "there will not be a dead calm very long."

And there, in at the shore, we see a dark line on the water; and it spreads and spreads; the air becomes gratefully cool to the face before the breeze perceptibly fills the sails; then there is a cheerful swing over of the boom and a fluttering of the as yet unreleased head-sails. A welcome breeze, surely, from the far hills of Kingairloch. We thank you, you beautiful Kingairloch, with your deep glens and your rose-purple shoulders of hills: long may you continue to send fresh westerly winds to the parched and passing voyager!

We catch a distant glimpse of the white houses of Port Appin; we bid adieu to the musically-named Eilean-na-Shuna; far ahead of us is the small white

lighthouse at the mouth of the narrows of Corran. But there is to be no run up to Fort William for us to-night; the tide will turn soon; we cannot get through the Corran narrows. And so there is a talk of Ballahulish; and Captain John is trying hard to get Miss Avon to pronounce this Bal-a-chaolish. It is not fair of Sandy from Islay—who thinks he is hidden by the foresail—to grin to himself at these innocent efforts.

Grander and grander grow those ramparts of mountains ahead of us—with their wine-coloured stains of heather on the soft and velvety yellow-green. The wind from the Kingairloch shores still carries us on; and Inversanda swells the breeze; soon we shall be running into that wide channel that leads up to the beautiful Loch Leven. The Laird reappears on deck. He is quite enchanted with the scene around him. He says if an artist had placed that black cloud behind the great bulk of Ben Nevis, it could not have been more artistically arranged. He declares that this entrance to Loch Leven is one of the most beautiful places he has ever seen. He calls attention to the soft green foliage of the steep hills; and to that mighty peak of granite, right in the middle of the landscape, that we discover to be called the Pap of Glencoe. And here, in the mellow light of the afternoon, is the steamer coming down from the north: is it to be a race between us for the Bal-a-chaolish quay?

It is an unfair race. We have to yield to brute strength and steam kettles.

Four to one Argyle came on,

as the dirge of Eric says. But we bear no malice. We salute our enemy as he goes roaring and throbbing by; and there is many a return signal waved to us from the paddle-boxes.

"Mr. Sutherland is no there, mem, I think," says Captain John, who has been scanning those groups of people with his keen eyes.

"I should think not; he said he was coming to-morrow," is the answer.

"Will he be coming down by the *Chevalier* in the morning, or by the *Mountaineer* at night?" is the further question.

"I don't know."

"We will be ashore for him in the morning, whatever," says John of Skye cheerfully; and you would have thought it was his guest, and not ours, who was coming on board.

The roaring out of the anchor chain was almost immediately followed by Master Fred's bell. Mary Avon was silent and *distraite* at dinner; but nothing more was said of her return to London. It was understood that, when Angus Sutherland came on board, we should go back to Castle Osprey, and have a couple of days on shore, to let the *White Dove* get rid of her parasitic seaweed.

Then, after dinner, a fishing excursion; but this was in a new loch, and we were not very successful. Or was it that most of us were watching, from this cup of water surrounded by the circle of great mountains, the strange movings of the clouds in the gloomy and stormy twilight, long after the sun had sunk?

"It is not a very sheltered place," remarked the Laird, "if a squall were to come down from the hills."

But by and by something appeared that lent an air of stillness and peace to this sombre scene around us. Over one of those eastern mountains a faint, smoky, suffused yellow light began to show; then the outline of the mountain—serrated with trees—grew dark; then the edge of the moon appeared over the black line of trees; and by and by the world was filled with this new, pale light, though the shadows on the hills were deeper than ever. We did not hurry on our way back to the yacht. It was a magical night—the black, overhanging hills, the white clouds crossing the blue vaults of the heavens, the wan light on the sea. What

need for John of Skye to put up that golden lamp at the bow? But it guided us on our way back—under the dusky shadows of the hills.

Then below, in the orange-lit cabin, with cards and dominoes and chess about, a curious thing overhead happens to catch the eye of one of the gamblers. Through the skylight, with this yellow glare, we ought not to see anything; but there, shining in the night, is a long bar of pale phosphorescent green light. What can this be? Why green? And it is Mary Avon who first suggests what this strangely luminous thing must be—the boom, wet with the dew, shining in the moonlight.

"Come," says the Laird to her, "put a shawl round ye, and we will go up for another look round."

And so, after a bit, they went on deck, these two, leaving the others to their bézique. And the Laird was as careful about the wrapping up of this girl as if she had been a child of five years of age; and when they went out on to the white deck, he would give her his arm that she should not trip over any stray rope; and they were such intimate friends now that he did not feel called upon to talk to her.

But by and by the heart of the Laird was lifted up within him because of the wonderful beauty and silence of this moonlight night.

"It is a great peety," said he, "that you in the south are not brought up as children to be familiar with the Scotch version of the Psalms of David. It is a fountain-head of poetry that ye can draw from all your life long; and is there any poetry in the world can beat it? And many a time I think that David had a great love for mountains—and that he must have looked at the hills around Jerusalem—and seen them on many a night like this. Ye cannot tell, lassie, what stirs in the heart of a Scotchman or Scotchwoman when they repeat the 121st Psalm:—

I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid;
My safety cometh from the Lord
Who heaven and earth hath made.
Thy foot He'll not let slide, nor will
He slumber that thee keeps:
Behold, He that keeps Israel
He slumbers not nor sleeps.

Ask your friend Dr. Sutherland—ask him whether he has found anything among his philosophy, and science, and the new-fangled leeterature of the day that comes so near to his heart as a verse of the old Psalms that he learnt as a boy. I have heard of Scotch soldiers in distant countries just bursting out crying, when they heard by chance a bit repeated o' the Psalms of David. And the strength and reliance of them: what grander source of consolation can ye have? 'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth, even for ever.' What are the trials of the hour to them that believe and know and hope? They have a sure faith; the captivity is not for ever. Do ye remember the beginning of the 126th Psalm—it reminds me most of all of the Scotch phrase

'laughin' maist like to greet'

—'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south!'"

The Laird was silent for a minute or two; there was nothing but the pacing up and down the moonlit deck.

"And you have your troubles too, my lass," said he, at length. "Oh, I know—though ye put so brave a face on it. But you need not be afraid; you need not

be afraid. Keep up your heart. I am an old man now; I may have but few years to reckon on; but while I live ye will not want a friend. . . . Ye will not want a friend. . . . If I forget, or refuse what I promise ye this night, may God do so and more unto me!"

But the good-hearted Laird will not have her go to sleep with this solemnity weighing on her mind.

"Come, come," he says cheerfully, "we will go below now; and you will sing me a song—the Queen's Maries, if ye like—though I doubt but that they were a lot o' wild hizzies."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"MARY, MARY!"

Is THERE any one awake and listening—perhaps with a tremor of the heart—for the calling out of "*White Dove,* ahoy!" from the shore? Once the ordinary loud noises of the morning are over—the brief working of the pump, the washing down of the decks—silence reigns once more throughout the yacht. One can only hear a whispering of the rain above.

Then, in the distance, there is a muffled sound of the paddles of a steamer; and that becomes fainter and fainter, while the *White Dove* gradually loses the motion caused by the passing waves. Again there is an absolute stillness; with only that whispering of the rain.

But this sudden sound of oars? and the slight shock against the side of the vessel? The only person on board the yacht who is presentable whips a shawl over her head, darts up the companion way, and boldly emerges into the moist and dismal morning.

"Oh, Angus!" she cries, to this streaming black figure that has just stepped on deck, "what a day you have brought with you!"

"Oh, it is nothing!" says a cheerful voice from out of the dripping macintosh—perhaps it is this shining black garment that makes the wet face and whiskers and hair glow redder than ever, and makes the blue eyes look even bluer. "Nothing at all! John and I have agreed it is going to clear. But this is a fine place to be in, with a falling glass! If you get a squall down from Glencoe, you won't forget it."

"A squall!" she says, looking round, in amazement. Well might she exclaim; for the day is still, and grey, and sombre; the mountains are swathed in mist; the smooth sea troubled only by the constant rain.

However, the ruddy-faced Doctor, having divested himself of his dripping garment, follows his hostess down the companion, and into the saloon, and sits down on one of the couches. There is an odd, half pathetic expression on his face, as he looks around.

"It seems a long time ago," he says, apparently to himself.

"What does?" asks his hostess, removing her head-gear.

"The evenings we used to spend in this very saloon," says he—looking with a strange interest on those commonplace objects, the draughts and dominoes, the candlesticks and cigar-boxes, the cards and books —"away up there in the north. It seems years since we were at Dunvegan, doesn't it, and lying off Vaternish Point? There never was as snug a cabin as this in any yacht. It is like returning to an old home to get into it."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," says his hostess, regarding him with a great kindliness. "We will try to make you forget that you have ever been away. Although," she added frankly, "I must tell

you you have been turned out of your state-room—for a time. I know you won't mind having a berth made up for you on one of those couches."

"Of course not," he said; "if I am not in your way at all. But——"

And his face asked the question.

"Oh! it is a nephew of Denny-mains who has come on board—a Mr. Smith, a very nice young fellow; I am sure you will like him."

There was nothing said in reply to this.

Then the new-comer inquired, rather timidly, "You are all well, I hope?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And—and Miss Avon, too?" said he.

"Oh, yes! But Mary has suffered a great misfortune since you left."

She looked up quickly. Then she told him the story; and in telling him her indignation awoke afresh. She spoke rapidly. The old injury had touched her anew.

But, strangely enough, although Angus Sutherland displayed a keen interest in the matter, he was not at all moved to that passion of anger and desire for vengeance that had shaken the Laird. Not at all. He was very thoughtful for a time; but he only said, "You mean she has to support herself now?"

"Absolutely."

"She will naturally prefer that to being dependent on her friends?"

"She will not be dependent on her friends, I know," is the answer; "though the Laird has taken such a great liking for her that I believe he would give her half Denny-mains."

He started a little bit at this; but immediately said—

"Of course she will prefer independence. And, as you say, she is quite capable of earning her own living. Well, she does not worry about it? It does not trouble her mind?"

"That affair of her uncle wounded her very keenly, I imagine, though she said little; but as for the loss of her little fortune, not at all! She is as light-hearted as ever. The only thing is that she is possessed by a mad notion that she should start away at once for London."

"Why?"

"To begin work; I tell her she must work here."

"But she is not anxious? She is not troubled?"

"Not a bit! The Laird says she has the courage of ten men; and I believe him."

"That is all right. I was going to prescribe a course of Marcus Aurelius; but if you have got philosophy in your blood, it is better than getting it through the brain."

And so this talk ended; leaving on the mind of one of those two friends a distinct sense of disappointment. She had been under the impression that Angus Sutherland had a very warm regard for Mary Avon; and she had formed certain other suspicions. She had made sure that he, more quickly than any one else, would resent the injury done to this helpless girl. And now he seemed to treat it as of no account. If she was not troubling herself; if she was not giving herself headaches about it; then, no matter! It was a professional view of the case. A dose of Marcus Aurelius? It was not thus that the warm-hearted Laird had espoused Mary Avon's cause.

Then the people came one by one in to breakfast; and our young Doctor was introduced to the stranger who had ousted him from his state-room. Last of all came Mary Avon.

How she managed to go along to him, and to shake hands with him, seeing that her eyes were bent on the floor all the time, was a mystery. But she did shake hands with him; and said, "How do you do?" in a somewhat formal manner; and she seemed a little paler than usual.

"I don't think you are looking quite as well as when I left," said he, with a great interest and kindness in his look.

"Thank you, I am very well," she said; and then she instantly turned to the Laird and began chatting to him. Angus Sutherland's face burned red; it was not thus she had been used to greet him in the morning, when we were far away beyond the shores of Canna.

And then, when we found that the rain was over, and that there was not a breath of wind in this silent, grey, sombre world of mountain and mist, and when we went ashore for a walk along the still lake, what must she needs do but attach herself to the Laird, and take no notice of her friend of former days? Angus walked behind with his hostess, but he rarely took his eyes off the people in front. And when Miss Avon, picking up a wild flower now and again, was puzzling over its name, he did not, as once he would have done, come to her help with his student-days' knowledge of botany. Howard Smith brought her a bit of wall rue, and said he thought they called it *Asplenium marinum:* there was no interference. The preoccupied Doctor behind only asked how far Miss Avon was going to walk with her lame foot.

The Laird of Denny-mains knew nothing of all this occult business. He was rejoicing in his occupation of philosopher and guide. He was assuring us all that this looked like a real Highland day—far more so than the Algerian blue sky that had haunted us for so long. He pointed out, as we walked along the winding shores of Loch Leven, by the path that rose, and fell, and skirted small precipices all hanging in foliage, how beautiful was that calm, slate-blue mirror beneath, showing every outline of the sombre mountains, with their masses of Landseer mist. He stopped his companion to ask her if she had ever seen anything finer in colour than the big clusters of scarlet rowans among

the yellow-green leaves? Did she notice the scent of the meadow-sweet, in the moist air of this patch of wood? He liked to see those white stars of the grass-of-Parnassus; they reminded him of many a stroll among the hills about Loch Katrine.

"And this still Loch Leven," he said at length, and without the least blush on his face, "with the Glencoe mountains at the end of it, I have often heard say was as picturesque a loch as any in Scotland, on a gloomy day like this. Gloomy I call it, but ye see there are fine silver glints among the mist; and—and, in fact, there's a friend of mine has often been wishing to have a water-colour sketch of it. If ye had time, Miss Mary, to make a bit drawing from the deck of the yacht, ye might name your own price—just name your own price. I will buy it for him."

A friend! Mary Avon knew very well who the friend was.

"I should be afraid, sir," said she, laughing, "to meddle with anything about Glencoe."

"Toots! toots!" said he; "ye have not enough confidence. I know twenty young men in Edinburgh and Glasgow who have painted every bit of Glencoe, from the bridge to the King's House inn, and not one of them able to come near ye. Mind, I'm looking forward to showing your pictures to Tom Galbraith; I'm thinking he'll stare!"

The Laird chuckled again.

"Oh, ay! he does not know what a formidable rival has come from the south; I'm thinking he'll stare when he comes to Denny-mains to meet ye. Howard, what's that down there?"

The Laird had caught sight of a pink flower on the side of a steep little ravine, leading down to the shore.

"Oh, I don't want it; I don't want it!" Mary Avon cried.

But the Laird was obdurate. His nephew had to go scrambling down through the alders and rowan-

trees and wet bracken to get this bit of pink crane's bill for Miss Avon's bouquet. And of course she was much pleased; and thanked him very prettily; and was it catch-fly, or herb robert, or what was it?

Then out of sheer common courtesy she had to turn to Angus Sutherland.

"I am sure Dr. Sutherland can tell us," she says, timidly; and she does not meet his eyes.

"It is one of the crane's-bills, any way," he says, indifferently. "Don't you think you had better return now, Miss Avon, or you will hurt your foot?"

"Oh, my foot is quite well now, thank you!" she says; and on she goes again.

We pass by the first cuttings of the slate-quarries; the men suspended by ropes round their waists and hewing away at the face of the cliff. We go through the long straggling village; and the Laird remarks that it is not usual for a Celtic race to have such clean cottages, with pots of flowers in the window. We saunter idly onwards, towards those great mountain-masses, and there is apparently no thought of returning.

"When we've gone so far, might we not go on to the mouth of the pass?" she asks. "I should like to have a look even at the beginning of Glencoe."

"I thought so," said the Laird, with a shrewd smile. "Oh, ay! we may as well go on."

Past those straggling cottages, with the elder-bush at their doors to frighten away witches; over the bridge that spans the brawling Cona; along the valley down which the stream rushes; and this gloom overhead deepens and deepens. The first of the great mountains appears on our right, green to the summit, and yet so sheer from top to bottom that it is difficult to understand how those dots of sheep maintain their footing. Then the marks on him; he seems to be a huge Behemoth, with great eyes, grand, complacent, even sardonic in his look. But the further and further mountains have nothing of this mild, grand humour

about them; they are sullen and awful; they grasp the earth with their mighty bulk below, but far away they lift their lurid peaks to the threatening skies, up there where the thunder threatens to shake the silence of the world.

"Miss Avon," Dr. Sutherland again remonstrates, "you have come five or six miles now. Suppose you have to walk back in the rain?"

"I don't mind about that," she says, cheerfully. "But I am dreadfully, dreadfully hungry."

"Then we must push on to Clachaig," says the Laird; "there is no help for it."

"But wait a moment," she says.

She goes to the side of the road, where the great grey boulders, and ferns, and moist marsh-grass are, and begins to gather handfuls of "sourocks;" that is to say, of the smaller sheep's sorrel. "Who will partake of this feast to allay the pangs of hunger?"

"Is thy servant a baa-lamb that she should do this thing?" her hostess says, and drives the girl forward.

The inn is reached but in time; for behold there is a grey "smurr" of mist coming down the glen; and the rain is beginning to darken the grey boulders. And very welcome are those chairs, and the bread and cheese and beer, and the humble efforts in art around the walls. If the feast is not as the feasting of the Fishmongers—if we have no pretty boxes to carry home to the children—if we have no glimpses of the pale blue river and shipping through the orange light of the room, at least we are not amazed by the appearance of the Duke of Sussex in the garb of a Highlander. And the frugal meal is substantial enough. Then the question about getting back arises.

"Now, Mary," says her hostess, "you have got to pay for your amusement. How will you like walking seven or eight miles in a thunderstorm?'

But here the Laird laughs.

"No, no," he says, going to the window. "That

waggonette that has just come up I ordered at the inn on passing. Ye will not have to walk a step, my lass; but I think we had better be going, as it looks black overhead."

Black enough, indeed, was it as we drove back in this silent afternoon, with a thunderstorm apparently about to break over our heads. And it was close and sultry when we got on board again, though there was as yet no wind. Captain John did not like the look of the sky.

"I said you were going to bring a gale with you, Angus," his hostess remarked to him, cheerfully, at dinner.

"It begins to look like it," he answered, gravely; "and it is getting too late to run away from here if the wind rises. As soon as it begins to blow, if I were John, I would put out the starboard anchor."

"I know he will take your advice," she answers, promptly.

We saw little of Angus Sutherland that evening; for it was raining hard and blowing hard; and the cabin below, with its lit candles, and books and cards, and what not, was cheerful enough; while he seemed very much to prefer being on deck. We could hear the howling of the wind through the rigging, and the gurgling of the water along the sides of the yacht; and we knew by the way she was swaying that she was pulling hard at her anchor chain. There was to be no beautiful moonlight for us that night, with the black shadows on the hills, and the lane of silver on the water.

A dripping and glistening figure comes down the companion; a gleaming red face appears at the door. Mary Avon looks up from her draughts, but for an instant.

"Well, Angus, what is the report?" says Queen Titania, brightly. "And what is all the noise on deck? And why don't you come below?"

"They have been paying out more anchor chain," says the rough voice from out of the macintosh; "it is likely to be a nasty night, and we are going to lower the topmast now. I want you to be so kind as to tell Fred to leave out some whisky and some bread and cheese; for John thinks of having an anchor watch."

"The bread and cheese and whisky Fred can get at any time," says she; and she adds with some warmth, "But you are not going to stay on deck on such a night? Come in here at once. Leave your macintosh on the steps."

Is it that he looks at that draught-board? It is Mr. Howard Smith who is playing with Mary Avon. The faithless Miranda has got another Ferdinand now.

"I think I would rather take my turn like the rest," he says, absently. "There may be some amusement before the morning."

And so the black figure turned away and disappeared; and a strange thing was that the girl playing draughts seemed to have been so bewildered by the apparition that she stared at the board, and could not be got to understand how she had made a gross and gigantic blunder.

"Oh, yes; oh, certainly!" she said, hurriedly; but she did not know how to retrieve her obvious mistake.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNSPOKEN APPEAL.

"WHAT have I done? Is she vexed? Have I offended her?" he asked the next morning, in a rapid manner, when his hostess came on deck. The gale had abated somewhat, but gloom overspread earth and sky. It was nothing to the gloom that overspread his usually frank and cheerful face.

"You mean Mary?" she says, though she knows well enough.

"Yes; haven't you seen? She seems to treat me as though we had never met before—as though we were perfect strangers—and I know she is too kind-hearted to cause any one pain——"

Here he looks somewhat embarrassed for a moment; but his customary straightforwardness comes to his rescue.

"Yes; I will confess I am very much hurt by it. And—and I should like to know if there is any cause. Surely you must have noticed it?"

She had noticed it, sure enough; and, in contrast with that studied coldness which Mary Avon had shown to her friend of former days, she had remarked the exceeding friendliness the young lady was extending to the Laird's nephew. But would she draw the obvious conclusion? Not likely; she was too staunch a friend to believe any such thing. All the same there remained in her mind a vague feeling of surprise, with perhaps a touch of personal injury.

"Well, Angus, you know," she said, evasively; Mary is very much preoccupied just at present. Her whole condition of life is changed, and she has many things to think of——"

"Yes; but she is frank enough with her other friends. What have I done, that I should be made a stranger of?"

A pathetic answer comes to these idle frettings of the hour. Far away on the shore a number of small black figures emerge from the woods, and slowly pass along the winding road that skirts the rocks. They are following a cart—a common farmyard cart; but on the wooden planks is placed a dark object that is touched here and there with silver—or perhaps it is only the white cords. Between the overhanging gloom of the mountains and the cold greys of the wind-swept sea the small black line passes slowly on.

And these two on board the yacht watch it in silence. Are they listening for the wail of the pipes—the wild dirge of Lord Lovat, or the cry of the *Cumhadh na Cloinne?* But the winds are loud, and the rushing seas are loud; and now the rude farmyard cart, with its solemn burden, is away out at the point; and presently the whole simple pageant has disappeared. The lonely burying-ground lies far away among the hills.

Angus Sutherland turns round again, with a brief sigh.

"It will be all the same in a few years," he says to his hostess; and then he adds, indifferently, "What do you say about starting? The wind is against us; but anything is better than lying here. There were some bad squalls in the night."

Very soon after this the silent loch is resounding with the rattle of halyards, blocks, and chains; and Angus Sutherland is seeking distraction from those secret cares of the moment in the excitement of hard work. Nor is it any joke getting in that enormous quantity of anchor chain. In the midst of all the noise and bustle Mary Avon appears on deck to see what is going on, and she is immediately followed by young Smith.

"Why don't you help them?" she says, laughing.

"So I would, if I knew what to do," he says, good-naturedly. "I'll go and ask Dr. Sutherland."

It was a fatal step. Angus Sutherland suggested, somewhat grimly, that, if he liked, he might lend them a hand at the windlass. A muscular young Englishman does not like to give in; and for a time he held his own with the best of them; but long before the starboard anchor had been got up, and the port one hove short, he had had enough of it. He did not volunteer to assist at the throat halyards. To Miss Avon, who was calmly looking on, he observed that it would take him about a fortnight to get his back straight.

"That," said she, finding an excuse for him instantly, "is because you worked too hard at it at first. You should have watched the Islay man. All he does is to call 'Heave!' and to make his shoulders go up as if he were going to do the whole thing himself. But he does not help a bit. I have watched him again and again."

"Your friend, Dr. Sutherland," said he, regarding her for an instant as he spoke, "seems to work as hard as any of them."

"He is very fond of it," she said, simply, without any embarrassment; nor did she appear to regard it as singular that Angus Sutherland should have been spoken of specially as her friend.

Angus Sutherland himself comes rapidly aft, loosens the tiller rope, and jams the helm over. And now the anchor is hove right up; the reefed mainsail and small jib quickly fill out before this fresh breeze; and, presently, with a sudden cessation of noise, we are spinning away through the leaden-coloured waters. We are not sorry to get away from under the gloom of these giant hills; for the day still looks squally, and occasionally a scud of rain comes whipping across, scarcely sufficient to wet the decks. And there is more life and animation on board now; a good deal of walking up and down in ulsters, with inevitable collisions; and of remarks shouted against, or with, the wind; and of joyful pointing towards certain silver gleams of light in the west and south. There is hope in front; behind us nothing but darkness and the threatenings of storm. The Pap of Glencoe has disappeared in rain; the huge mountains on the right are as black as the deeds of murder done in the glen below; Ardgour over there, and Lochaber here, are steeped in gloom. And there is less sadness now in the old refrain of Lochaber since there is a prospect of the South shining before us. If Mary Avon is singing to herself about

Lochaber no more! And Lochaber no more!
We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more!

—it is with a light heart.

But then if it is a fine thing to go bowling along with a brisk breeze on our beam, it is very different when we get round Ardshiel and find the southerly wind veering to meet us dead in the teeth. And there is a good sea running up Loch Linnhe—a heavy grey-green sea that the *White Dove* meets and breaks, with spurts of spray forward, and a line of hissing foam in our wake. The zig-zag beating takes us alternately to Ardgour and Appin, until we can see here and there the cheerful patches of yellow corn at the foot of the giant and gloomy hills; then "'Bout ship" again, and away we go on the heaving and rushing grey-green sea.

And is Mary Avon's oldest friend—the woman who is the staunchest of champions—being at last driven to look askance at the girl? Is it fair that the young lady should be so studiously silent when our faithful Doctor is by, and instantly begin to talk again when he goes forward to help at the jib or foresail sheets? And when he asks her, as in former days, to take the tiller, she somewhat coldly declines the offer he has so timidly and respectfully made. But as for Mr. Smith, that is a very different matter. It is he whom she allows to go below for some wrapper for her neck. It is he who stands by, ready to shove over the top of the companion when she crouches to avoid a passing shower of rain. It is he with whom she jokes and talks—when the Laird does not monopolise her.

"I would have believed it of any girl in the world rather than of her," says her hostess, to another person, when these two happen to be alone in the saloon below. "I don't believe it yet. It is impossible. Of course a girl who is left as penniless as she is might be pardoned for looking round and being friendly with rich people who are well inclined towards her; but I don't believe

—I say it is impossible—that she should have thrown Angus over just because she saw a chance of marrying the Laird's nephew. Why, there never was a girl we have ever known so independent as she is!—not any one half as proud and as fearless. She looks upon going to London and earning her own living as nothing at all! She is the very last girl in the world to speculate on making a good match—she has too much pride—she would not speak another word to Howard Smith if such a monstrous thing were suggested to her."

"Very well," says the meek listener. The possibility was not of his suggesting, assuredly: he knows better.

Then the Admiral-in-chief of the *White Dove* sits silent and puzzled for a time.

"And yet her treatment of poor Angus is most unfair. He is deeply hurt by it—he told me so this morning——"

"If he is so fearfully sensitive that he cannot go yachting and enjoy his holiday because a girl does not pay him attention——"

"Why, what do you suppose he came back here for?" she says, warmly. "To go sailing in the *White Dove?* No; not if twenty *White Doves* were waiting for him! He knows too well the value of his time to stay away so long from London if it were merely to take the tiller of a yacht. He came back here, at great personal sacrifice, because Mary was on board."

"Has he told you so?"

"He has not; but one has eyes."

"Then suppose she has changed her mind: how can you help it?"

She says nothing for a second. She is preparing the table for Master Fred: perhaps she tosses the novels on to the couch with an impatience they do not at all deserve. But at length she says—

"Well; I never thought Mary would have been so fickle as to go chopping and changing about within

the course of a few weeks. However, I won't accuse her of being mercenary; I will not believe that. Howard Smith is a most gentlemanly young man—good-looking, too, and pleasant tempered. I can imagine any girl liking him."

Here a volume of poems is pitched on to the top of the draught-board, as if it had done her some personal injury.

"And in any case she might be more civil to one who is a very old friend of ours," she adds.

Further discourse on this matter is impossible; for our Freidrich d'or comes in to prepare for luncheon. But why the charge of incivility? When we are once more assembled together, the girl is quite the reverse of uncivil towards him. She shows him—when she is forced to speak to him—an almost painful courtesy; and she turns her eyes down, as if she were afraid to speak to him. This is no flaunting coquette, proud of her wilful caprice.

And as for poor Angus, he does his best to propitiate her. They begin talking about the picturesqueness of various cities. Knowing that Miss Avon has lived the most of her life, if she was not actually born, in London, he strikes boldly for London. What is there in Venice, what is there in the world, like London in moonlight—with the splendid sweep of her river—and the long lines of gas-lamps—and the noble bridges? But she is all for Edinburgh: if Edinburgh had but the Moldau running through that valley, and the bridges of Prague to span it, what city in Europe could compare with it? And the Laird is so delighted with her approval of the Scotch capital, that he forgets for the moment his Glaswegian antipathy to the rival city, and enlarges no less on the picturesqueness of it than on its wealth of historical traditions. There is not a stain of blood on any floor that he does not believe in. Then the Sanctuary of Holyrood; what stories has he not to tell about that famous refuge?

"I believe the mysterious influence of that Sanctuary has gone out and charmed all the country about Edinburgh," said our young Doctor. "I suppose you know that there are several plants poisonous elsewhere, that are quite harmless in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh. You remember I told you, Miss Avon, that evening we went out to Arthur's Seat?"

It was well done, Queen Titania must have thought, to expose this graceless flirt before her new friends. So she had been walking out to Arthur's Seat with him, in the summer afternoons?

"Y—yes," says the girl.

"Ay; that is a most curious thing," says the Laird, not noticing her downcast looks and flushed cheeks. "But what were they, did ye say?"

"Umbelliferous plants," replies Angus Sutherland, in quite a matter-of-fact manner. "The *Œnanthe crocata* is one of them, I remember; and I think the *Cicuta virosa*—that is, the Water Hemlock."

"I would jist like to know," says the Laird, somewhat pompously, "whether that does not hold good about the neighbourhood of Glesca also. There's nothing so particular healthy about the climate of Edinburgh, as far as ever I heard tell of. Quite the reverse—quite the reverse. East winds—fogs—no wonder the people are shilpit-looking creatures as a general rule—like a lot o' Paisley weavers. But the ceety is a fine ceety, I will admit that; and many's the time I've said to Tom Galbraith that he could get no finer thing to paint than the view of the High Street at night from Prince's Street—especially on a moonlight night. A fine ceety: but the people themselves!—" here the Laird shook his head. "And their manner o' speech is most vexsome—a long, singsong kind o' yaumering as if they had not sufficient manliness to say outright what they meant. If we are to have a Scotch accent, I prefer the accent—the very slight accent—ye hear about Glesca. I would

like to hear what Miss Avon has to say upon that point."

"I am not a very good judge, sir," says Miss Avon, prudently.

Then on deck. The leaden-black waves are breaking in white foam along the shores of Kingairlock and the opposite rocks of Eilean-na-Shuna; and we are still laboriously beating against the southerly wind; but those silver-yellow gleams in the south have increased, over the softly-purple hills of Morvern and Duart. Black as night are the vast ranges of mountains in the north; but they are far behind us; we have now no longer any fear of a white shaft of lightning falling from the gloom overhead.

The decks are dry now; camp-stools are in requisition; there is to be a consultation about our future plans, after the *White Dove* has been beached for a couple of days. The Laird admits that, if it had been three days or four days, he would like to run through to Glasgow and to Strathgovan, just to see how they are getting on with the gas-lamps in the Mitherdrum Road; but, as it is, he will write for a detailed report; hence he is free to go wherever we wish. Miss Avon, interrogated, answers that she thinks she must leave us and set out for London; whereupon she is bidden to hold her tongue and not talk foolishness. Our Doctor, also interrogated, looks down on the sitting parliament—he is standing at the tiller—and laughs.

"Don't be too sure of getting to Castle Osprey to-night," he says, "whatever your plans may be. The breeze is falling off a bit. But you may put me down as willing to go anywhere with you, if you will let me come."

This decision seemed greatly to delight his hostess. She said we could not do without him. She was herself ready to go anywhere now; she eagerly embraced the Youth's suggestion that there were, according to John of Skye's account, vast numbers of seals in the bays

on the western shores of Knapdale; and at once assured the Laird, who said he particularly wanted a sealskin or two and some skarts' feathers for a young lady, that he should not be disappointed. Knapdale, then, it was to be.

But in the mean time? Dinner found us in a dead calm. After dinner, when we came on deck, the sun had gone down; and in the pale, tender blue-grey of the twilight, the golden star of Lismore lighthouse was already shining. Then we had our warning lights put up—the port red light shedding a soft crimson glow on the bow of the dingay, the starboard green light touching with a cold, wan colour the iron shrouds. To crown all, as we were watching the dark shadows of Lismore island, a thin, white, vivid line—like the edge of a shilling—appeared over the low hill; and then the full moon rose into the partially clouded sky. It was a beautiful night.

But we gave up all hope of reaching Castle Osprey. The breeze had quite gone; the calm sea slowly rolled. We went below—to books, draughts, and what not; Angus Sutherland alone remaining on deck, having his pipe for his companion.

It was about an hour afterwards that we were startled by sounds on deck; and presently we knew that the *White Dove* was again flying through the water. The women took some little time to get their shawls and things ready; had they known what was awaiting them, they would have been more alert.

For no sooner were we on deck than we perceived that the *White Dove* was tearing through the water without the slightest landmark or light to guide her. The breeze that had sprung up had swept before it a bank of sea-fog—a most unusual thing in these windy and changeable latitudes; and so dense was this fog that the land on all sides of us had disappeared, while it was quite impossible to say where Lismore lighthouse was. Angus Sutherland had promptly sur-

rendered the helm to John of Skye; and had gone forward. The men on the look-out at the bow were themselves invisible.

"Oh, it is all right, mem!" called out John of Skye, through the dense fog, in answer to a question. "I know the lay o' the land very well, though I do not see it. And I will keep her down to Duart, bekass of the tide."

And then he calls out—

"Hector, do you not see any land yet?"

"*Cha n'eil!*" answers Hector, in his native tongue.

"We'll put a tack on her now. Ready about, boys!"

"*Ready about!*"

Round slews her head, with blocks and sails clattering and flapping; there is a scuffle of making fast the lee sheets; then once more the *White Dove* goes plunging into the unknown. The non-experts see nothing at all but the fog; they have not the least idea whether Lismore lighthouse—which is a solid object to run against—is on port or starboard bow, or right astern, for the matter of that. They are huddled in a group about the top of the companion. They can only listen, and wait.

John of Skye's voice rings out again.

"Hector, can you not mek out the land yet?"

"*Cha n'eil!*"

"What does he say?" the Laird asks, almost in a whisper: he is afraid to distract attention at such a time.

"He says 'No,'" Angus Sutherland answers. "He cannot make out the land. It is very thick; and there are bad rocks between Lismore and Duart. I think I will climb up to the cross-trees and have a look round."

What was this? A girl's hand laid for an instant on his arm; a girl's voice—low, quick, beseeching—saying "*Oh, no!*"

It was the trifle of a moment.

"There is not the least danger," says he, lightly. "Sometimes you can see better at the cross-trees."

Then the dim figure is seen going up the shrouds; but he is not quite up at the cross-trees, when the voice of John of Skye is heard again.

"Mr. Sutherland!

"All right, John!" and the dusky figure comes stumbling down and across the loose sheets on deck.

"If ye please, sir," says John of Skye; and the well-known formula means that Angus Sutherland is to take the helm. Captain John goes forward to the bow: the only sound around us is the surging of the unseen waves.

"I hope you are not frightened, Miss Avon," says Mr. Smith, quite cheerfully; though he is probably listening, like the rest of us, for the sullen roaring of breakers in the dark.

"No—I am bewildered—I don't know what it is all about."

"You need not be afraid," Angus Sutherland says to her, abruptly, for he will not have the Youth interfere in such matters, "with Captain John on board. He sees better in a fog than most men in daylight."

"We are in the safe keeping of one greater than any Captain John," says the Laird, simply and gravely: he is not in any alarm.

Then a call from the bow.

"Helm hard down, sir!"

"Hard down it is, John!"

Then the rattle again of sheets and sails; and as she swings round again on the other tack, what is that vague, impalpable shadow one sees—or fancies one sees—on the starboard bow?

"Is that the land, John?" Angus Sutherland asks, as the skipper comes aft.

"Oh, ay!" says he, with a chuckle. "I was thinking to myself it wass the loom of Duart I sah once or twice. And I wass saying to Hector if it wass his

sweetheart he will look, for he will see better in the night."

Then by and by this other object, to which all attention is summoned: the fog grows thinner and thinner; some one catches sight of a pale, glimmering light on our port quarter; and we know that we have left Lismore lighthouse in our wake. And still the fog grows thinner, until it is suffused with a pale blue radiance; then suddenly we sail out into the beautiful moonlight, with the hills along the horizon all black under the clear and solemn skies.

It is a pleasant sail into the smooth harbour on this enchanted night: the far windows of Castle Osprey are all aglow; the mariners are to rest for a while from the travail of the sea. And as we go up the moonlit road, the Laird is jocular enough; and asks Mary Avon, who is his companion, whether she was prepared to sing "Lochaber no more!" when we were going blindly through the mist. But our young Doctor remembers that hour or so of mist for another reason. There was something in the sound of the girl's voice he cannot forget. The touch of her hand was slight; but his arm has not even yet parted with the thrill of it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HIS LORDSHIP.

Miss Avon is seated in the garden in front of Castle Osprey, under the shade of a drooping ash. Her book lies neglected beside her, on the iron seat; she is idly looking abroad on the sea and the mountains, now all aglow in the warm light of the afternoon.

There is a clanging of a gate below. Presently, up the steep gravel path, comes a tall and handsome

young fellow, in full shooting accoutrement, with his gun over his shoulder. Her face instantly loses its dreamy expression. She welcomes him with a cheerful "Good evening!" and asks what sport he has had. For answer he comes across the greensward; places his gun against the trunk of the ash; takes a seat beside her; and puts his hands round one knee.

"It is a long story," says the Youth. "Will it bore you to hear it? I've seen how the women in a country house dread the beginning of the talk at dinner about the day's shooting; and yet give themselves up, like the martyrs and angels they are; and—and it is very different from hunting, don't you know, for there the women can talk as much as anybody."

"Oh! but I should like to hear, really," says she. "It was so kind of a stranger on board a steamer to offer you a day's shooting."

"Well it was," says he; "and the place has been shot over only once—on the 12th. Very well; you shall hear the whole story. I met the keeper by appointment, down at the quay. I don't know what sort of a fellow he is—Highlander or Lowlander—I am not such a swell at those things as my uncle is; but I should have said he talked a most promising mixture of Devonshire, Yorkshire, and Westmoreland——"

"What was his name?"

"I don't know," says the other leisurely. "I called him Donald, on chance; and he took to it well enough. I confess I thought it rather odd he had only one dog with him—an old retriever; but then, don't you know, the moor had been shot over only once; and I thought we might get along. As we walked along to the hill, Donald says, 'Dinna tha mind, sir, if a blackcock gets up; knock un ower, knock un ower, sir.'"

At this point Miss Avon most unfairly bursts out laughing.

"Why," she says, "what sort of countryman was

he if he talked like that? That is how they speak in plays about the colliery districts."

"Oh, it's all the same!" says the young man, quite unabashed. I gave him my bag to carry, and put eight or ten cartridges in my pockets. 'A few mower, sir; a few mower, sir,' says Donald; and crams my pockets full. Then he would have me put cartridges in my gun even before we left the road; and as soon as we began to ascend the hill I saw he was on the outlook for a straggler or two, or perhaps a hare. But he warned me that the shooting had been very bad in these districts this year; and that on the 12th the rain was so persistent that scarcely anybody went out. Where could we have been on the 12th? surely there was no such rain with us?"

"But when you are away from the hills you miss the rain," remarks this profound meteorologist.

"Ah! perhaps so. However, Donald said, 'His lordship went hout for an hour, and got a brace and a alf. His lordship is no keen for a big bag, ye ken; but is just satisfied if he can get a brace or a couple of brace afore luncheon. It is the exerceez he likes.' I then discovered that Lord —— had had this moor as part of his shooting last year; and I assured Donald I did not hunger after slaughter. So we climbed higher and higher. I found Donald a most instructive companion. He was very great on the ownership of the land about here; and the old families, don't you know; and all that kind of thing. I heard a lot about the MacDougalls, and how they had all their possessions confiscated in 1745; and how, when the Government pardoned them, and ordered the land to be restored, the Campbells and Breadalbane, into whose hands it had fallen, kept all the best bits for themselves. I asked Donald why they did not complain; he only grinned; I suppose they were afraid to make a row. Then there was one MacDougall, an admiral or captain, don't you know; and he sent a boat to rescue some

shipwrecked men, and the boat was swamped. Then he would send another; and that was swamped, too. The Government, Donald informed me, wanted to hang him for his philanthropy; but he had influential friends; and he was let off on the payment of a large sum of money—I suppose out of what Argyll and Breadalbane had left him."

The Youth calmly shifted his hands to the other knee.

"You see, Miss Avon, this was all very interesting; but I had to ask Donald where the birds were. 'I'll let loose the doag now,' says he. Well; he did so. You would have thought he had let loose a sky-rocket! It was off and away—up hill and down dale—and all his whistling wasn't of the slightest use. 'He's a bit wild,' Donald had to admit; 'but if I had kent you were agoin' shootin' earlier in the morning, I would have given him a run or two to take the freshness hoff. But on a day like this, sir, there's no scent; we will just have to walk them up; they'll lie as close as a water-hen.' So we left the dog to look after himself; and on we pounded. Do you see that long ridge of rugged hill?"

He pointed to the coast-line beyond the bay.

"Yes."

"We had to climb that, to start with; and not even a glimpse of a rabbit all the way up. ''Ave a care, sir,' says Donald; and I took down my gun from my shoulder, expecting to walk into a whole covey at least. 'His lordship shot a brace and a alf of grouse on this wery knoll the last day he shot over the moor last year.' And now there was less talking, don't you know; and we went cautiously through the heather, working every bit of it, until we got right to the end of the knoll. 'It's fine heather,' says Donald; 'bees would dae well here.' On we went; and Donald's information began again. He pointed out a house on some distant island where Alexander III. was buried. 'But where are the

birds?' I asked of him, at last. 'Oh,' says he, 'his lordship was never greedy after the shootin'! A brace or two afore luncheon was all he wanted. He baint none o' your greedy ones, he baint. His lordship shot a hare on this very side last year—a fine long shot.' We went on again: you know what sort of morning it was, Miss Avon?"

"It was hot enough even in the shelter of the trees."

"Up there it was dreadful: not a breath of wind: the sun blistering. And still we ploughed through that knee-deep heather, with the retriever sometimes coming within a mile of us; and Donald back to his old families. It was the MacDonnells now; he said they had no right to that name; their proper name was MacAlister—Mack Mick Alister, I think he said. 'But where the dickens are the birds?' I asked. 'If we get a brace afore luncheon, we'll do fine,' said he; and then he added, 'There's a braw cold well down there that his lordship aye stopped at.' The hint was enough; we had our dram. Then we went on, and on, and on, and on, until I struck work, and sat down, and waited for the luncheon basket."

"We were so afraid Fred would be late," she said; "the men were all so busy down at the yacht."

"What did it matter?" the Youth said, resignedly. "I was being instructed. He had got further back still now, to the Druids, don't you know, and the antiquity of the Gaelic language. 'What was the river that ran by Rome?' 'The Tiber,' I said. 'And what,' he asked, 'was *Tober* in Gaelic but a spring or fountain?' And the Tamar in Devonshire was the same thing. And the various Usks—*uska*, it seems, is the Gaelic for water. Well, I'm hanged if I know what that man did *not* talk about!"

"But surely such a keeper must be invaluable," remarked the young lady, innocently.

"Perhaps. I confess I got a little bit tired of it; but no doubt the poor fellow was doing his best to

make up for the want of birds. However, we started again after luncheon. And now we came to place after place where his lordship had performed the most wonderful feats last year. And, mind you, the dog wasn't ranging so wild now; if there had been the ghost of a shadow of a feather in the whole district we must have seen it. Then we came to another well where his lordship used to stop for a drink. Then we arrived at a crest where no one who had ever shot on the moor had ever failed to get a brace or two. A brace or two! What we flushed was a covey of sheep that flew like mad things down the hill. Well, Donald gave in at last. He could not find words to express his astonishment. His lordship had never come along that highest ridge without getting at least two or three shots. And when I set out for home, he still stuck to it; he would not let me take the cartridges out of my gun; he assured me his lordship never failed to get a snipe or a blackcock on the way home. Confound his lordship!"

"And is that all the story?" says the young lady, with her eyes wide open.

"Yes, it is," says he, with a tragic gloom on the handsome face.

"You have not brought home a single bird?"

"Not a feather!—never saw one."

"Nor even a rabbit?"

"Nary rabbit."

"Why, Fred was up here a short time ago, wanting a few birds for the yacht."

"Oh, indeed," says he, with a sombre contempt. "Perhaps he will go and ask his lordship for them. In the mean time, I'm going in to dress for dinner. I suppose his lordship would do that, too, after having shot his thirty brace."

"You must not, any way," she says. "There is to be no dressing for dinner to-day; we are all going down to the yacht after."

"At all events," he says, "I must get my shooting things off. Much good I've done with 'em!"

So he goes into the house, and leaves her alone. But this chat together seems to have brightened her up somewhat; and with a careless and cheerful air she goes over to the flower borders and begins culling an assortment of various-hued blossoms. The evening is becoming cooler; she is not so much afraid of the sun's glare; it is a pleasant task; and she is singing, or humming, snatches of songs of the most heterogeneous character.

Then fill up a bumper!—what can I do less
Than drink to the health of my bonny Black Bess?

—this is the point at which she has arrived when she suddenly becomes silent, and for a second her face is suffused with a conscious colour. It is our young Doctor who has appeared on the gravel path. She does not rise from her stooping position; but she hurries with her work.

"You are going to decorate the dinner-table, I suppose?" he says, somewhat timidly.

"Yes," she answers, without raising her head. The fingers work nimbly enough: why so much hurry?

"You will take some down to the yacht, too?" he says. "Everything is quite ready now for the start to-morrow."

"Oh, yes!" she says. "And I think I have enough now for the table. I must go in."

"Miss Avon," he says; and she stops—with her eyes downcast. "I wanted to say a word to you. You have once or twice spoken about going away. I wanted to ask you—you won't think it is any rudeness. But if the reason was—if it was the presence of any one that was distasteful to you——"

"Oh, I hope no one will think that!" she answers, quickly; and for one second the soft, black, pathetic eyes meet his. "I am very happy to be amongst

such good friends—too happy, I think—I, I must think of other things——"

And here she seems to force this embarrassment away from her; and she says to him, with quite a pleasant air—

"I am so glad to hear that the *White Dove* will sail so much better now. It must be so much more pleasant for you, when you understand all about it."

And then she goes into the house to put the flowers on the table. He, left alone, goes over to the iron seat beneath the ash tree; and takes up the book she has been reading and bends his eyes on the page. It is not the book he is thinking about.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAIRD'S PLANS.

WHO is first up to thrust aside those delusive yellow blinds that suggest sunshine whether the morning be fair or foul? But the first glance through the panes removes all apprehensions: the ruffled bay, the fluttering ensign, the shining white wings of the *White Dove* are all a summons to the slumbering house. And the mistress of Castle Osprey, as soon as she is dressed, is up-stairs and down-stairs like a furred flash of lightning. Her cry and potent command—a reminiscence of certain transatlantic experiences—is, "*All aboard for Dan'l's!*" She will not have so fine a sailing morning wasted, especially when Dr. Angus Sutherland is with us.

Strangely enough, when at last we stand on the white decks, and look round on the shining brass and varnished wood, and help to stow away the various articles needed for our cruise, he is the least excited of

all those chattering people. There is a certain conscious elation on starting on a voyage, especially on a beautiful morning; but there also may be some vague and dim apprehension. The beginning is here; but the end? Angus walked about with Captain John, and was shown all that had been done to the yacht, and listened in silence.

But the rest were noisy enough, calling for this and that, handing things down the companion, and generally getting in the way of the steward.

"Well, Fred," says our facetious Laird, "have ye hung up all the game that Mr. Smith brought back from the moor yesterday?" and Master Fred was so much tickled by this profound joke that he had to go down into the forecastle to hide his grinning delight, and went covertly smiling about his work for the next quarter of an hour.

Then the hubbub gradually ceased; for the boats had been swung to the davits, and the *White Dove* was gently slipping away from her moorings. A fine northerly breeze; a ruffled blue sea; and the south all shining before her! How should we care whither the beautiful bird bore us? Perhaps before the night fell we should be listening for the singing of the mermaid of Colonsay.

The wooded shores slowly drew away; the horizon widened; there was no still blue, but a fine windy grey, on the vast plain of the sea that was opening out before us.

"Oh, yes, mem!" says John of Skye to Miss Avon. "I wass sure we would get a good breeze for Mr. Sutherland when he will come back to the yat."

Miss Avon does not answer: she is looking at the wide sea, and at the far islands, with somewhat wistful eyes.

"Would you like to tek the tiller, now, mem?" says the bearded skipper, in his most courteous tones. "Mr. Sutherland was aye very proud to see ye at the tiller."

"No, thank you, John," she says.

And then she becomes aware that she has—in her absent mood—spoken somewhat curtly; so she turns and comes over to him, and says in a confidential way—

"To tell you the truth, John, I never feel very safe in steering when the yacht is going before the wind. When she is close-hauled I have something to guide me; but with the wind coming behind I know I may make a blunder without knowing why."

"No, no, mem; you must not let Mr. Sutherland hear you say that: when he was so prood o' learnin' ye; and there is no dancher at ahl of your making a plunder."

But at this moment our young Doctor himself comes on deck; and she quickly moves away to her camp-stool and plunges herself into a book; while the attentive Mr. Smith provides her with a sunshade and a footstool. Dr. Sutherland cannot, of course, interfere with her diligent studies.

Meanwhile our hostess is below, putting a few finishing touches to the decoration of the saloon; while the Laird, in the blue-cushioned recess at the head of the table, is poring over *Municipal London*. At length he raises his eyes, and says to his sole companion—

"I told ye, ma'am, he was a good lad—a biddable lad—did I not?"

"You are speaking of your nephew, of course," she says. "Well; it is very kind of him to offer to turn out of his state-room in favour of Dr. Sutherland; but there is really no need for it. Angus is much better accustomed to roughing it on board a yacht."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," says the Laird, with judicial gravity. "Howard is in the right there too. He must insist on it. Dr. Sutherland is your oldest friend. Howard is here on a kind of sufferance. I am sure we are both of us greatly obliged to ye."

Here there was the usual deprecation.

"And I will say," observes the Laird, with the same

profound air, "that his conduct since I sent for him has entirely my approval—entirely my approval. Ye know what I mean. I would not say a word to him for the world—no, no—after the first intimation of my wishes, no coercion. Every one for himself: no coercion."

She does not seem so overjoyed as might have been expected.

"Oh, of course not!" she says. "It is only in plays and books that anybody is forced into a marriage; at least you don't often find a man driven to marry anybody against his will. And indeed, sir," she adds, with a faint smile, "you rather frightened your nephew at first. He thought you were going to play the part of a stage guardian, and disinherit him if he did not marry the young lady. But I took the liberty of saying to him that you could not possibly be so unreasonable. Because, you know, if Mary refused to marry him, how could that be any fault of his?"

"Precisely so," said the Laird, in his grand manner. "A most judeecious and sensible remark. Let him do his part, and I am satisfied. I would not exact impossibeelities from any one, much less from one that I have a particular regard for. And, as I was saying, Howard is a good lad."

The Laird adopted a lighter tone.

"Have ye observed, ma'am, that things are not at all unlikely to turn out as we wished?" he said, in a half-whisper; and there was a secret triumph in his look. "Have ye observed? Oh, yes! young folks are very shy; but their elders are not blind. Did ye ever see two young people that seemed to get on better together on so short an acquaintance?"

"Oh, yes!" she says, rather gloomily; "they seem to be very good friends."

"Yachting is a famous thing for making people acquainted," says the Laird, with increasing delight. "They know one another now as well as though they

had been friends for years on the land. Has that struck ye now before?"

"Oh, yes!" she says. There is no delight on *her* face.

"It will jist be the happiness of my old age, if the Lord spares me, to see these two established at Denny-mains," says he, as if he were looking at the picture before his very eyes. "And we have a fine soft air in the west of Scotland: it's no like asking a young English leddy to live in the bleaker parts of the north, or among the east winds of Edinburgh. And I would not have the children sent to any public school, to learn vulgar ways of speech and clipping of words. No, no; I would wale out a young man from our Glasgow University—one familiar with the proper tradeetions of the English language: and he will guard against the clipping fashion of the South, just as against the yaumering of the Edinburgh bodies. Ah will wale him out maself. But no too much education: no, no; that is the worst gift ye can bestow upon bairns. A sound constitution; that is first and foremost. I would rather see a lad out and about shooting rabbits than shut up wi' a pale face among a lot of books. And the boys will have their play, I can assure ye; I will send that fellow Andrew about his business if he doesna stop netting and snaring. What do I care about the snipping at the shrubs? I will put out turnips on the verra lawn, jist to see the rabbits run about in the morning. The boys shall have their play at Denny-mains, I can assure ye; more play than school-hours, or I'm mistaken!"

The Laird laughed to himself just as if he had been telling a good one about Homesh.

"And no muzzle-loaders," he continued, with a sudden seriousness. "Not a muzzle-loader will I have put into their hands. Many's the time it makes me grue to think of my loading a muzzle-loader when I was a boy—loading one barrel, with the other barrel

on full-cock, and jist gaping to blow my fingers off. I'm thinking Miss Mary—though she'll no be Miss Mary then—will be sore put to when the boys bring in thrushes and blackbirds they have shot; for she's a sensitive bit thing; but what I say is, better let them shoot thrushes and blackbirds than bring them up to have white faces ower books. Ah tell ye this: I'll give them a sovereign a-piece for every blackbird they shoot on the wing!"

The Laird had got quite excited; he did not notice that *Municipal London* was dangerously near the edge of the table.

"Andrew will not objeck to the shooting o' blackbirds," he said, with a loud laugh—as if there was something of Homesh's vein in that gardener. "The poor crayture is just daft about his cherries. That's another thing; no interference with bairns in a garden. Let them steal what they like. Green apples? bless ye, they're the life o' children! Nature puts everything to rights. She kens better than books. If I catched the schoolmaster lockin' up they boys in their play-hours, my word but I'd send him fleein'!"

He was most indignant with this schoolmaster, although he was to be of his own "waling." He was determined that the lads should have their play, lessons or no lessons. Green apples he preferred to Greek. The dominie would have to look out.

"Do you think, ma'am," he says, in an insidious manner; "do ye think she would like to have a furnished house in London for pairt of the year? She might have her friends to see——"

Now at last this is too much. The gentle, small creature has been listening with a fine, proud, hurt air on her face, and with tears near to her eyes. Is it thus that her Scotch student, of whom she is the fierce champion, is to be thrust aside?

"Why," she says, with an indignant warmth; "you take it all for granted! I thought it was a joke. Do

you really think your nephew is going to marry Mary? And Angus Sutherland in love with her!"

"God bless me!" exclaimed the Laird, with such a start that the bulky *Municipal London* banged down on the cabin floor.

Was it the picking up of that huge tome, or the consciousness that he had been betrayed into an unusual ejaculation, that crimsoned the Laird's face? When he sate upright again, however, wonder was the chief expression visible in his eyes.

"Of course I have no right to say so," she instantly and hurriedly adds: "it is only a guess—a suspicion. But haven't you seen it? And until quite recently I had other suspicions, too. Why, what do you think would induce a man in Angus Sutherland's position to spend such a long time in idleness?"

But by this time the Laird had recovered his equanimity. He was not to be disturbed by any bogie. He smiled serenely.

"We will see, ma'am; we will see. If it is so with the young man, it is a peety. But you must admit yourself that ye see how things are likely to turn out?"

"I don't know," she said, with reluctance: she would not admit that she had been grievously troubled during the past few days.

"Very well, ma'am, very well," said the Laird, blithely. "We will see who is right. I am not a gambler, but I would wager ye a gold ring, a sixpence, and a silver thimble that I am no so far out. I have my eyes open; oh, aye! Now I am going on deck to see where we are."

And so the Laird rose, and put the bulky volume by, and passed along the saloon to the companion. We heard

Sing tántara! Sing tántara!

as his head appeared. He was in a gay humour.

Meanwhile the *White Dove*, with all sail set, had come along at a spanking pace. The weather threatened change, it is true; there was a deep gloom overhead; but along the southern horizon there was a blaze of yellow light which had the odd appearance of being a sunset in the middle of the day; and in this glare lay the long blue promontory known as the Rhinns of Islay, within sight of the Irish coast. And so we went down by Easdail, and past Colipoll and its slate-quarries; and we knew this constant breeze would drive us through the swirls of the Dorus Mohr —the "Great Gate." And were we listening, as we drew near in the afternoon to the rose-purple bulk of Scarba, for the low roar of Corrievrechan? We knew the old refrain:—

As you pass through Jura's Sound
Bend your course by Scarba's shore;
Shun, oh, shun the gulf profound
Where Corrievrechan's surges roar!

But now there is no ominous murmur along those distant shores. Silence and a sombre gloom hang over the two islands. We are glad to shun this desolate coast; and glad that the *White Dove* is carrying us away to the pleasanter south, when, behold! behold! another sight! As we open out the dreaded gulf, Corrievrechan itself becomes but an open lane leading out to the west; and there, beyond the gloom, amid the golden seas, lies afar the music-haunted Colonsay! It is the calm of the afternoon; the seas lie golden around the rocks; surely the sailors can hear her singing now for the lover she lost so long ago! What is it that thrills the brain so, and fills the eyes with tears, when we can hear no sound at all coming over the sea?

It is the Laird who summons us back to actualities.

"It would be a strange thing," says he, "if Tom Galbraith were in that island at this very meenit. Ah'm sure he was going there."

And Captain John helps.

"I not like to go near Corrievrechan," he says, with a grin, "when there is a flood tide and half a gale from the sou'-west. It is an ahfu' place," he adds, more seriously, "an ahfu' place."

"I should like to go through," Angus Sutherland says, quite inadvertently.

"Aye, would ye, sir?" says Captain John, eagerly. "If there wass only you and me on board, I would tek you through ferry well—with the wind from the norrard and an ebb tide. Oh, yes! I would do that; and maybe we will do it this year yet!"

"I do not think I am likely to see Corrievrechan again this year," said he, quite quietly—so quietly that scarcely any one heard. But Mary Avon heard.

Well, we managed, after all, to bore through the glassy swirls of the Dorus Mohr—the outlying pickets, as it were, of the fiercer whirlpools and currents of Corrievrechan—and the light breeze still continuing we crept along in the evening past Crinan, and along the lonely coast of Knapdale, with the giant Paps of Jura darkening in the west. Night fell; the breeze almost died away; we turned the bow of the *White Dove* towards an opening in the land, and the flood tide gently bore her into the wide, silent, empty loch. There did not seem to be any light on the shores. Like a tall, grey phantom the yacht glided through the gloom; we were somewhat silent on deck.

But there was a radiant yellow glow coming through the skylight; and Master Fred had done his best to make the saloon cheerful enough. And where there is supper there ought to be other old-fashioned institutions—singing, for example; and how long was it since we had heard anything about the Queen's Maries, or "Ho, ro, clansmen!" or the Irish Brigade? Nobody, however, appeared to think of these things. This was a silent and lonely loch, and the gloom of night was over land and water; but we still seemed to

have before our eyes the far island amid the golden seas. And was there not still lingering in the night air some faint echo of the song of Colonsay? It is a heart-breaking song; it is all about the parting of lovers.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SUNDAY IN FAR SOLITUDES.

MARY AVON is seated all alone on deck, looking rather wistfully around her at this solitary Loch-na-Chill—that is, the Loch of the Burying Place. It is Sunday morning, and there is a more than Sabbath peace dwelling over sea and shore. Not a ripple on the glassy sea; a pale haze of sunshine on the island in the south; a stillness as of death along the low-lying coast. A seal rises to the surface of the calm sea, and regards her for a moment with his soft black eyes; then slowly subsides. She has not seen him; she is looking far away.

Then a soft step is heard on the companion; and the manner of the girl instantly changes. Are these tears that she hastily brushes aside? But her face is all smiles to welcome her friend. She declares that she is charmed with the still beauty of this remote and solitary loch.

Then other figures appear; and at last we are all summoned on deck for morning service. It is not an elaborate ceremony; there are no candles, or genuflexions, or embroidered altar-cloths. But the Laird has put on a black frock coat, and the men have put aside their scarlet cowls and wear smart sailor-looking cloth caps. Then the Laird gravely rises, and opens his book.

Sometimes, it is true, our good friend has almost

driven us to take notice of his accent, and we have had our little jokes on board about it; but you do not pay much heed to these peculiarities when the strong and resonant voice—amid the strange silence of this Loch of the Burying Place—reads out the 103rd Psalm: "Like as a father peetieth his children," he may say; but one does not heed that. And who is to notice that, as he comes to these words, he lifts his eyes from the book and fixes them for a moment on Mary Avon's downcast face? "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children." Then, when he had finished the Psalm, he turned to the New Testament, and read in the same slow and reverent manner the 6th chapter of Matthew. This concluded the service; it was not an elaborate one.

Then, about an hour afterwards, the Laird, on being appealed to by his hostess, gave it as his opinion that there would be no Sabbath desecration at all in our going ashore to examine the ruins of what appeared to be an ancient chapel, which we could make out by the aid of our glasses on the green slope above the rocks. And as our young friends—Angus and the Youth—idly paddled us away from the yacht, the Laird began to apologise to his hostess for not having lengthened the service by the exposition of some chosen text.

"Ye see, ma'am," he observed, "some are gifted in that way, and some not. My father, now, had an amazing power of expounding and explaining—I am sure there was nothing in *Hutcheson's Exposeetion* he had not in his memory. A very famous man he was

in those days as an Anti-Lifter—very famous; there were few who could argue with him on that memorable point."

"But what did you call him, sir?" asks his hostess, with some vague notion that the Laird's father had lived in the days of body-snatchers.

"An Anti-Lifter: it was a famous controversy; but ye are too young to remember of it perhaps. And now in these days we are more tolerant, and rightly so; I do not care whether the minister lifts the sacramental bread before distribution or not, now that there is no chance of Popery getting into our Presbyterian Church in disguise. It is the speerit, not the form, that is of importance · our Church authoritatively declares that the efficacy of the sacraments depends not 'upon any virtue in them or in him that doth administer them.' Aye; that is the cardinal truth. But in those days they considered it right to guard against Popery in every manner; and my father was a prominent Anti-Lifter; and well would he argue and expound on that and most other doctrinal subjects. But I have not much gift that way," added the Laird, modestly; quite forgetting with what clearness he had put before us the chief features of the great Semple case.

"I don't think you have anything to regret, sir," said our young Doctor, as he carelessly worked the oar with one hand, "that you did not bother the brains of John and his men with any exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. Isn't it an odd thing that the common fishermen and boatmen of the Sea of Galilee understood the message Christ brought them just at once? and now a days, when we have millions of churches built, and millions of money being spent, and tons upon tons of sermons being written every year, we seem only to get further and further into confusion and chaos. Fancy the great army of ablebodied men that go on expounding and expounding; and the

learning and time and trouble they bestow on their work; and scarcely any two of them agreed; while the people who listen to them are all in a fog. Simon Peter, and Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, must have been men of the most extraordinary intellect. They understood at once; they were commissioned to teach; and they had not even a Shorter Catechism to go by."

The Laird looked at him doubtfully. He did not know whether to recognise in him a true ally or not. However, the mention of the Shorter Catechism seemed to suggest solid ground; and he was just about entering into the question of the Subordinate Standards when an exclamation of rage on the part of his nephew startled us. That handsome lad, during all this theological discussion, had been keeping a watchful and matter-of-fact eye on a number of birds on the shore; and now that we were quite close to the sandy promontory, he had recognised them.

"Look! look!" he said, in tones of mingled eagerness and disappointment. "Golden plovers, every one of them! Isn't it too bad? It's always like this on Sunday. I will bet you won't get within half a mile of them to-morrow!"

And he refused to be consoled as we landed on the sandy shore; and found the golden-dusted long-legged birds running along before us, or flitting from patch to patch of the moist greensward. We had to leave him behind in moody contemplation as we left the shore and scrambled up the rugged and rocky slope to the ruins of this solitary little chapel.

There was an air of repose and silence about these crumbling walls and rusted gates that was in consonance with a habitation of the dead. And first of all, outside, we came upon an upright Iona cross, elaborately carved with strange figures of men and beasts. But inside the small building, lying prostrate among the grass and weeds, there was a collection of

those memorials that would have made an antiquarian's heart leap for joy. It is to be feared that our guesses about the meaning of the emblems on the tomb-stones were of a crude and superficial character. Were these Irish chiefs, those stone figures with the long sword and the harp beside them? Was the recurrent shamrock a national or religious emblem? And why was the effigy of this ancient worthy accompanied by a pair of pincers, an object that looked like a tooth-comb, and a winged griffin? Again, outside, but still within the sacred walls, we came upon still further tombs of warriors, most of them hidden among the long grass; and here and there we tried to brush the weeds away. It was no bad occupation for a Sunday morning, in this still and lonely burial-place above the wide seas.

On going on board again we learned from John of Skye that there were many traces of an ancient ecclesiastical colonisation about this coast; and that in especial there were a ruined chapel and other remains on one of a small group of islands that we could see on the southern horizon. Accordingly, after luncheon, we fitted out an expedition to explore that distant island. The Youth was particularly anxious to examine these ecclesiastical remains; he did not explain to everybody that he had received from Captain John a hint that the shores of this sainted island swarmed with seals.

And now the gig is shoved off; the four oars strike the glassy water; and away we go in search of the summer isles in the south. The Laird settles himself comfortably in the stern; it seems but natural that he should take Mary Avon's hand in his, just as if she were a little child.

"And ye must know, Miss Mary," he says, quite cheerfully, "that if ever ye should come to live in Scotland, ye will not be persecuted with our theology. No, no; far from it; we respect every one's religion, if it is sincere; though we cling to our own. And

why should we not cling to it, and guard it from error? We have had to fight for our civil and religious leeberties inch by inch, foot by foot; and we have won. The blood of the saints has not been shed in vain. The cry of the dying and wounded on many a Lanarkshire moor—when the cavalry were riding about, and hewing and slaughtering—was not wasted on the air! The Lord heard, and answered. And we do well to guard what we have gained; and, if need were, there are plenty of Scotsmen alive at this day who would freely spend their lives in defending their own releegion. But ye need not fear. These are the days of great toleration. Ye might live in Scotland all your life, and not hear an ill word said of the Episcopal Church!"

After having given this solemn assurance, the Laird cast a glance of sly humour at Angus Sutherland.

"I will confess," said he, "when Dr. Sutherland brought that up this morning about Peter and Andrew, and James and John, I was a bit put out. But then," he added, triumphantly, "ye must remember that in those days they had not the inseedious attacks of Prelacy to guard against. There was no need for them to erect bulwarks of the faith. But in our time it is different, or rather it has been different. I am glad to think that we of the Scotch Church are emancipated from the fear of Rome; and I am of opeenion that with the advancing times they are in the right who advocate a little moderation in the way of applying and exacting the Standards. No, no; I am not for bigotry. I assure ye, Miss Mary, ye will find far fewer bigots in Scotland than people say."

"I have not met any, sir," remarks Miss Mary.

"I tell ye what," said he, solemnly; "I am told on good authority that there is a movement among the U. P. Presbytery to send up to the Synod a sort of memorial with regard to the Subordinate Standards —that is, ye know, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms—just

ainting, in a mild sort of way, that these are of human composition, and necessarily imperfect; and that a little amount of—of——"

The Laird could not bring himself to pronounce the word "laxity." He stammered and hesitated, and at last said—

"Well; a little judeecious liberality of construction —do ye see?—on certain points is admissible, while clearly defining other points on which the Church will not admit of question. However, as I was saying, we have little fear of Popery in the Presbyterian Church now; and ye would have no need to fear it in your English Church if the English people were not so sorely wanting in humour. If they had any sense of fun they would have laughed those millinery, play-acting people out o' their Church long ago——"

But at this moment it suddenly strikes the Laird that a fair proportion of the people he is addressing are of the despised English race; and he hastily puts in a disclaimer.

"I meant the clergy, of course," says he, most unblushingly, "the English clergy, as having no sense of humour at all—none at all. Dear me, what a stupid man I met at Dunoon last year! There were some people on board the steamer talking about Homesh—ye know, he was known to every man who travelled up and down the Clyde—and they told the English clergyman about Homesh wishing he was a stot. 'Wishing he was a what?' says he. Would ye believe it, it took about ten meenutes to explain the story to him bit by bit; and at the end of it his face was as blank as a bannock before it is put on the girdle!"

We could see the laughter brimming in the Laird's eyes; he was thinking either of the stot or some other story about Homesh. But his reverence for Sunday prevailed. He fell back on the Standards; and was most anxious to assure Miss Avon that, if ever she

were to live in Scotland, she would suffer no persecution at all, even though she still determined to belong to the Episcopal Church.

"We have none in the neighbourhood of Strathgovan," he remarked, quite simply; "but ye could easily drive in to Glasgow"—and he did not notice the quick look of surprise and inquiry that Angus Sutherland immediately directed from the one to the other. But Mary Avon was looking down.

It was a long pull; but by and by the features of the distant island became clearer; and we made out an indentation that probably meant a creek of some sort. But what was our surprise, as we drew nearer and nearer to what we supposed to be an uninhabited island, to find the topmast of a vessel appearing over some rocks that guard the entrance to the bay? As we pulled into the still waters, and passed the heavy black smack lying at anchor, perhaps the two solitary creatures in charge of her were no less surprised at the appearance of strangers in these lonely waters. They came ashore just as we landed. They explained, in more or less imperfect English, that they were lobster-fishers; and that this was a convenient haven for their smack, while they pulled in their small boat round the shores to look after the traps. And if—when the Laird was not looking—his hostess privately negotiated for the sale of half-a-dozen live lobsters, and if young Smith also took a quiet opportunity of inquiring about the favourite resorts of the seals; what then? Mice will play when they get the chance. The Laird was walking on with Mary Avon; and was telling her about the Culdees.

And all the time we wandered about the deserted island, and explored its ruins, and went round its bays, the girl kept almost exclusively with the Laird, or with her other and gentle friend; and Angus had but little chance of talking to her or walking with her. He was left pretty much alone. Perhaps he was not

greatly interested in the ecclesiastical remains. But he elicited from the two lobster-fishers that the hay scattered on the floor of the chapel was put there by fishermen, who used the place to sleep in when they came to the island. And they showed him the curious tombstone of the saint, with its sculptured elephant and man on horseback. Then he went away by himself to trace out the remains of a former civilisation on the island; the withered stumps of a blackthorn hedge, and the abundant nettle. A big rat ran out; the only visible tenant of the crumbled habitation.

Meanwhile the others had climbed to the summit of the central hill; and behold! all around the smooth bays were black and shining objects, like the bladders used on fishermen's nets. But these moved this way and that; sometimes there was a big splash as one disappeared. The Youth sate and regarded this splendid hunting-ground with a breathless interest.

"I'm thinking ye ought to get your sealskin to-morrow, Miss Mary," says the Laird, for once descending to worldly things.

"Oh, I hope no one will be shot for me!" she said. "They are such gentle creatures."

"But young men will be young men, ye know," said he, cheerfully. "When I was Howard's age, and knew I had a gun within reach, a sight like that would have made my heart jump."

"Yes," said the nephew; "but you never do have a sight like that when you have a rifle within reach."

"Wait till to-morrow—wait till to-morrow," said the Laird, cheerfully. "And now we will go down to the boat. It is a long pull back to the yacht."

But the Laird's nephew got even more savage as we rowed back in the calm, pale twilight. Those wild duck would go whirring by within easy shot—apparently making away to the solitudes of Loch Swen. Then that greyish-yellow thing on the rocks—could it be a sheep? We watched it for several minutes, as

the gig went by in the dusk; then, with a heavy plunge or two, the seal floundered down and into the water. The splash echoed through the silence.

"Did you ever see the like of that?" the Youth exclaimed, mortified beyond endurance. "Did you ever? As big as a cow! And as sure as you get such a chance, it is Sunday!"

"I am very glad," says Miss Avon. "I hope no one will shoot a seal on my account."

"The seal ought to be proud to have such a fate," said the Laird, gallantly. "Ye are saving him from a miserable and lingering death of cold, or hunger, or old age. And whereas in that case nobody would care anything or see anything more about him, ye give him a sort of immortality in your dining-room, and ye are never done admiring him. A proud fellow he ought to be. And if the seals about here are no very fine in their skins, still it would be a curiosity, and at present we have not one at all at Denny-mains."

Again this reference to Denny-mains: Angus Sutherland glanced from one to the other; but what could he see in the dusk?

Then we got back to the yacht: what a huge grey ghost she looked in the gloom! And as we were all waiting to get down the companion, Angus Sutherland put his hand on his hostess's arm, and stayed her.

"You must be wrong," said he, simply. "I have offended her somehow. She has not spoken ten words to me to-day."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HIDDEN SPRINGS.

"WELL, perhaps it is better, after all," says a certain person, during one of those opportunities for brief conjugal confidences that are somewhat rare on board

ship. She sighs as she speaks. "I thought it was going to be otherwise. But it will be all the better for Angus not to marry for some years to come. He has a great future before him; and a wife would really be an encumbrance. Young professional men should never marry; their circumstances keep on improving, but they can't improve their wives."

All this is very clear and sensible. It is not always that this person talks in so matter-of-fact a way. If, however, everything has turned out for the best, why this sudden asperity with which she adds—

"But I did not expect it of Mary."

And then again—

"She might at least be civil to him."

"She is not uncivil to him. She only avoids him."

"I consider that her open preference for Howard Smith is just a little bit too ostentatious," she says, in rather an injured way. "Indeed, if it comes to that, she would appear to prefer the Laird to either of them. Any stranger would think she wanted to marry Dennymains himself."

"Has it ever occurred to you," is the respectful question, "that a young woman—say once in a century—may be in that state of mind in which she would prefer not to marry anybody?"

Abashed? Not a bit of it! There is a calm air of superiority on her face: she is above trifles and taunts.

"If unmarried women had any sense," she says, "that would be their normal state of mind."

And she might have gone on enlarging on this text, only that at this moment Mary Avon comes along from the ladies' cabin; and the morning greetings take place between the two women. Is it only a suspicion that there is a touch of coldness in the elder woman's manner? Is it possible that her love for Mary Avon may be decreasing by ever so little a bit?

Then Angus comes down the companion: he has

got some wild flowers; he has been ashore. And surely he ought to give them to the younger of the two women: she is of the age when such pretty compliments are a natural thing. But no. The flowers are for his hostess—for the decoration of her table; and Mary Avon does not look up as they are handed along.

Then young Mr. Smith makes his appearance; he has been ashore too. And his complaints and protests fill the air.

"Didn't I tell you?" he says, appealing more especially to the women-folk for sympathy. "Didn't I tell you? You saw all those golden plover yesterday, and the wild duck further up the loch: there is not a sign of one of them! I knew it would be so. As sure as Monday begins, you never get a chance! I will undertake to say that when we get to those islands where all the seals were yesterday, we sha'n't see one to-day!"

"But are we to stop here a whole day in order to let you go and shoot seals?" says his hostess.

"You can't help it," says he, laughing. "There isn't any wind."

"Angus," she says—as if nobody knew anything about the wind but the young Doctor—"is that so?"

"Not a doubt of it," he says. "But it is a beautiful day. You might make up a luncheon-party, and have a pic-nic by the side of the Saints' Well—down in the hollow, you know."

"Much chance I shall have with the seals, then!" remarks the other young man, goodnaturedly enough.

However, it is enough that the suggestion has come from Angus Sutherland. A pic-nic on the Island of the Saints is forthwith commanded—seals or no seals. And while Master Fred, immediately after breakfast, begins his preparations, the Laird helps by carefully putting a corkscrew in his pocket. It is his invariable custom. We are ready for any emergency.

And if the golden plover, and mergansers, and seals appear to know that the new, busy, brisk working-days have begun again, surely we ought to know it too. Here are the same silent shores; and the calm blue seas and blue sky; and the solitary islands in the south—all just as they were yesterday; but we have a secret sense that the lassitude and idleness of Sunday are over, and that there is something of freedom in the air. The Laird has no longer any need to keep a check on his tongue; those stories about Homesh may bubble up to the surface of his mind just as they please. And indeed he is exceedingly merry and facetious as the preparations go on for this excursion. When at length he gets into the stern of the boat he says to his companion—

> "*There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,*
> *And Mary Avon, and me.*

—What ails ye, lass? I have not heard much of your singing of late."

"You would not have me sing profane songs on Sunday?" she says, demurely.

"No; but I mean long before Sunday. However," he says, cheerfully, and looking at her, "there is a wonderful change in ye—wonderful! Well do I mind the day I first saw ye, on the quay; though it seems a long time since then. Ye were a poor white bit thing then; I was astonished; and the next day too, when ye were lame as well, I said to myself, 'Well; it's high time that bit lass had a breath o' the sea air.' And now—why ye just mind me o' the lasses in the Scotch songs—the country lasses, ye know—with the fine colour on your face."

And indeed this public statement did not tend to decrease the sunbrown that now tinged Mary Avon's cheeks.

"These lads," said he—no doubt referring to his nephew and to Angus Sutherland, who were both

labouring at the long oars—"are much too attentive to ye, putting ye under the shadow of the sails, and bringing ye parasols and things like that. No, no; don't you be afraid of getting sun-burnt; it is a comely and wholesome thing: is it not reasonable that human beings need the sunlight as much as plants? Just ask your friend Dr. Sutherland that; though a man can guess as much without a microscope. Keep ye in the sun, Miss Mary; never mind the brown on your cheeks, whatever the young men say: I can tell ye ye are looking a great deal better now than when ye stepped on shore—a shilpit pale bit thing—on that afternoon."

Miss Avon had not been in the habit of receiving lectures like this about her complexion, and she seemed rather confused; but fortunately the measured noise of the rowlocks prevented the younger men from overhearing.

"*There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,*
And Mary Avon, and me,"—

continued the Laird, in his facetious way; and he contentedly patted the hand of the girl beside him. "I fear I am growing very fond of idleness."

"I am sure, sir, you are so busy during the rest of the year," says this base flatterer, "that you should be able to enjoy a holiday with a clear conscience."

"Well, perhaps so—perhaps so," said the Laird, who was greatly pleased. "And yet, let one work as hard as one can, it is singular how little one can do, and what little thanks ye get for doing it. I am sure those people in Strathgovan spend half their lives in fault-finding; and expect ye to do everything they can think of without asking them for a farthing. At the last meeting of the ratepayers in the Burgh Hall I heckled them, I can tell ye. I am not a good speaker —no, no; far from it; but I can speak plain. I use words that can be driven into people's heads; and I

will say this, that some o' those people in Strathgovan have a skull of most extraordinar' thickness. But said I to them, 'Do ye expect us to work miracles? Are we to create things out of nothing? If the rates are not to be increased, where are the new gas-lamps to come from? Do ye think we can multiply gas-lamps as the loaves and fishes were multiplied?' I'm thinking," added the Laird, with a burst of hearty laughter, "that the thickest-skulled of them all understood that —eh?"

"I should hope so," remarked Miss Avon.

Then the measured rattle of the oars: it wants hard pulling against this fiercely-running tide; indeed, to cheat it in a measure, we have to keep working along the coast and across the mouth of Loch Swen.

> *"There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seaton,*
> *And Mary Avon, and me"—*

says the Laird, as a playful introduction to another piece of talking. "I have been asking myself once or twice whether I know any one in the whole kingdom of Scotland better than you."

"Than me, sir?" she says, with a start of surprise.

"Yes," he says, sententiously. "That is so. And I have had to answer myself in the naygative. It is wonderful how ye get to know a person on board a yacht. I just feel as if I had spent years and years with ye; so that there is not any one I know with whom I am better acquaint. When ye come to Dennymains, I shall be quite disappointed if ye look surprised or strange to the place. I have got it into my head that ye must have lived there all your life. Will ye undertake to say," he continues, in the same airy manner, "that ye do not know the little winding path that goes up through the trees to the flag-staff—eh?"

"I'm afraid I don't remember it," she says, with a smile.

"Wait till ye see the sunsets ye can see from there!"

he says, proudly. "We can see right across Glasgow to Tennants' Stalk; and in the afternoon the smoke is all turning red and brown with the sunset—many's and many's the time I have taken Tom Galbraith to the hill, and asked him whether they have finer sunsets at Naples or Venice. No, no; give me fire and smoke and meestery for a strong sunset. But just the best time of the year, as ye'll find out"—and here he looked in a kindly way at the girl—"where there is a bit wood near the house, is the spring-time. When ye see the primroses and the blue-bells about the roots of the trees—when ye see them so clear and bright among the red of the withered leaves—well, ye cannot help thinking about some of our old Scotch songs, and there's something in that that's just like to bring the tears to your een. We have a wonderful and great inheritance in these songs, as ye'll find out, my lass. You English know only of Burns; but a Scotchman, who is familiar with the ways and the feelings and the speech of the peasantry, has a sort o' uncomfortable impression that Burns is at times just a bit artifeecial and leeterary—especially when he is masquerading in fine English; though at other times ye get the real lilt—what a man would sing to himself when he was all alone at the plough, in the early morning, and listening to the birds around him. But there are others that we are proud of, too—Tannahill, and John Mayne, that wrote about *Logan Braes*; and Hogg, and Motherwell: I'm sure o' this, that when ye read Motherwell's *Jeanie Morrison*, ye'll no be able to go on for greetin'."

"I beg your pardon?" said Miss Avon.

But the Laird is too intent on recalling some of the lines to notice that she has not quite understood him.

"They were school-mates," he says, in an absent way. "When school was over, they wandered away like lad and lass; and he writes the poem in after-life, and speaks to her he has never seen since.

"Oh, mind ye, love, how oft we left
The deavin' dinsome toun,
To wander by the green burn-side,
And hear its water croon?
The simmer leaves hung ower our heads,
The flowers burst round our feet;
And in the gloamin' o' the wood
The throssil whistled sweet.

. . . .

"And on the knowe aboon the burn
For hours thegither sat
In the silentness o' joy, till baith
Wi' very gladness grat!
Aye, aye, dear Jeanie Morrison,
Tears trinkled down your cheek,
Like dew-beads on a rose, yet nane
Had ony power to speak!"

The Laird's voice faltered for a moment; but he pretended he had great difficulty in remembering the poem, and confessed that he must have mixed up the verses. However, he said he remembered the last one.

"O dear, dear Jeanie Morrison,
Since we were sundered young,
I've never seen your face, nor heard
The music of your tongue;
But I could hug all wretchedness,
And happy could I dee,
Did I but ken your heart still dreamed
O' bygane days and me!"

Just as he finished, the old Laird turned aside his head. He seemed to be suddenly interested in something over at the mouth of Loch Swen. Then he quickly passed his red silk handkerchief across his face, and said in a gay manner—though he was still looking in that alien direction—

"This is a desperate hard pull. We had nothing

like this yesterday. But it will do the lads good; it will take the stiffness out of their backs."

However, one of the lads—to wit, the Laird's nephew—admitted at length that he had had quite enough of it, and gave up his oar to the man he had relieved. Then he came into the stern, and was very pleasant and talkative; and said he had quite made up his mind to find all the seals gone from the shores of the sacred island.

So formidable, indeed, was the tide, that we had to keep well away to the south of the island before venturing to make across for it; and when at length we did put the bow straight for the little harbour, the mid-channel current swept us away northward, as if the gig had been a bit of cork. But the four oars kept manfully to their work; and by dint of hard pulling and pertinacious steering we managed to run into the little bay.

We found it quite deserted. The two lobster-fishers had left in the morning; we were in sole possession of this lonely island, set amid the still summer seas.

But by this time it was nearly noon; and so it was arranged that the men of the party should content themselves with a preliminary expedition, to find out, by stealthy crawlings out to the various bays, where the seals were chiefly congregated; while the women were to remain by the Saints' Well, to help Fred to get luncheon spread out and arranged. And this was done; and thus it happened that, after Master Fred had finished his work, and retired down to his mates in the gig, the two women-folk were left alone.

"Why, Mary," said the one of them, quite cheerfully (as we afterwards heard), "it is quite a long time since you and I had a chat together."

"Yes, it is."

"One gets so often interfered with on board, you know. Aren't you going to begin now and make a sketch?"

She had brought with her her sketching materials; but they were lying unopened on a rock hard by.

"No, I think not," she said, listlessly.

"What is the matter with you?" said her kind friend, pretending to laugh at her. "I believe you are fretting over the loss of the money, after all."

"Oh, no: I hope you do not think I am fretting!" said she, anxiously. "No one has said that? I am really quite content—I am very—happy."

She managed to say the word.

"I am very glad to hear it," said her friend; "but I have a great mind to scold you all the same."

The girl looked up. Her friend went over to her, and sate down beside her, and took her hand in hers.

"Don't be offended, Mary," she said, good-naturedly. "I have no right to interfere; but Angus is an old friend of mine. Why do you treat him like that?"

The girl looked at her with a sort of quick, frightened, inquiring glance; and then said—as if she were almost afraid to hear herself speak—

"Has he spoken to you?"

"Yes. Now don't make a mole-hill into a mountain, Mary. If he has offended you, tell him. Be frank with him. He would not vex you for the world: do you think he would?"

The girl's hand was beginning to tremble a good deal; and her face was white, and piteous.

"If you only knew him as well as I do, you would know he is as gentle as a child: he would not offend any one. Now, you will be friends with him again, Mary?"

The answer was a strango one. The girl broke into a fit of wild crying, and hid her face in her friend's bosom, and sobbed there so that her whole frame was shaken with the violence of her misery.

"Mary, what is it?" said the other, in great alarm.

Then, by and by, the girl rose, and went away over to her sketching materials for a minute or two. Then

she returned: her face still rather white, but with a certain cold and determined look on it.

"It is all a mistake," said she, speaking very distinctly. "Dr. Sutherland has not offended me in the least: please tell him so if he speaks again. I hope we shall always be good friends."

She opened out her colour-box.

"And then," said she, with an odd laugh, "before you think I have gone crazed, please remember it isn't every day one loses such an enormous fortune as mine."

She began to get her other sketching things ready. And she was very cheerful about it, and very busy; and she was heard to be singing to herself—

Then fill up a bumper: what can I do less
Than drink to the health of my bonny Black Bess?

But her friend, when by chance she turned her head a little bit, perceived that the pale and piteous face was still wet with tears; and the praises of Black Bess did not wholly deceive her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONFESSION.

WHAT could the solitary scouts, coming back from the various points of the island, know of this quick, unwilling cry of pain, and of the forced calm that followed it? They had their own sorrows. There was a gloom upon their faces. One and all bore the same story—not a seal, not a wild duck, not even a rock pigeon anywhere.

"But it is a fine thing to be able to straighten one's back," says the Laird, who always seizes on the

cheerful side; "and we have not given up hope of your getting the sealskin yet, Miss Mary—no, no. The Doctor says they are away hunting just now; when the tide gets low again they will come up on the rocks. So the best thing we can do is to spend plenty of time over our luncheon, and cross the island again in the afternoon. Aye; begun already?" adds the Laird, as he goes up to the canvas, and regards the rough outlines in charcoal with a critical air. "Very good! very good!" he says, following the lines with his thumb, and apparently drawing in the air. "Excellent! The composeetion very clever indeed—simple, bold, striking. And a fine blaze of colour ye'll have on a day like this; and then the heavy black hull of the smack bang in the foreground: excellent, excellent! But if I were you, I would leave out that rock there; ye would get a better sweep of the sea. Don't distract the eye in sea pieces; bold lines—firm, sound colour: and there ye are. Well, my lass, ye have the skill of constructing a picture. Tom Galbraith himself would admit that, I know——"

But here the Laird is called away by his hostess.

"I would advise you, sir," says she, "to have some luncheon while you can get it. It is a very strange thing, with all you gentlemen on board, and with all those guns lying about, but we are drawing nearer and nearer to starvation. I wish you would give up hunting seals, and shoot something useful."

Here our young Doctor appears with certain bottles that have been cooling in the water.

"There must be plenty of rock pigeons in the caves we passed this morning, on the other island," he says.

"Oh, not those beautiful birds!" says she of the empty larder. "We cannot have Hurlingham transported to the Highlands."

"Whoever tries to shoot those pigeons won't find it a Hurlingham business," he remarks.

But the Laird has a soul above luncheons, and larders, and pigeon-shooting. He is still profoundly absorbed in thought.

"No," he says at length, to the young lady who, as usual, is by his side. "I am wrong!"

She looks at him with some surprise.

"Yes, I am wrong," he says, decisively. "Ye must keep in that island. Ye must sacrifice picturesqueness to truth. Never mind the picture; keep the faithful record. In after life ye will be able to get plenty of pictures; but ye may not be able to get an exact record of the things ye saw when ye were sailing with the *White Dove*."

"Well, you know, sir," observes Miss Avon, with a somewhat embarrassed smile, "you don't give me much encouragement. You always speak as if I were to be compelled to keep those sketches. Am I to find nobody silly enough to buy them?"

Now, somehow or other of late, the Laird has been more and more inclined to treat the sale of Mary Avon's pictures as a most irresistible joke. He laughs and chuckles at the mere mention of such a thing, just as if Homesh were somewhere about.

"Sell them!" he says, with another deep chuckle. "Ye will never sell them. Ye could not have the heart to part with them."

"The heart has to be kept in proper subjection," says she, lightly, "when one has to earn one's living."

Queen Titania glances quickly at the girl; but apparently there is no profound meaning concealed in this speech. Miss Avon has taken her seat on a shelving piece of grey rock; and, if she is concerned about anything, it is about the safety of certain plates and knives and such things. Her hand is quite steady as she holds out her tumbler for the Youth to pour some water into the claret.

Luncheon over, she returns to her work; and the band of seal-hunters, taking to cigars and pipes, sit

and watch the tide slowly ebb away from the golden-brown seaweed. Then, with many a caution as to patience and silence, they rise and get their guns and set out. Already there is a disposition to slouch the head and walk timidly; though as yet there is no need of any precaution.

"*Glückliche Reise!*" says Miss Avon, pleasantly, as we pass.

Angus Sutherland starts, and turns his head. But the salutation was not for him; it was meant for the Youth, who is understood to be the most eager of the seal-hunters. And Mr. Smith, not having his answer pat, replies, "I hope so;" and then looks rather confused as he passes on, carefully stooping his head though there is no occasion whatever.

Then, by following deep gullies and crawling over open ledges, we reach points commanding the various bays; and with the utmost caution peer over or round the rocks. And whereas yesterday, being Sunday, the bays were alive with seals, disporting themselves freely in full view of a large party of people who were staring at them, to-day, being Monday, finds not a seal visible anywhere, though every one is in hiding, and absolute silence must have reigned in the islands, ever since the lobster fishers left in the morning. No matter; the tide is still ebbing; the true hunter must possess his soul.

And yet this lying prone for hours on a ledge of exceedingly rough rock must have been monotonous work for our good friend the Laird. Under his nose nothing to look at but scraps of orange lichen and the stray feathers of sea birds; abroad nothing but the glassy blue sea, with the pale mountains of Jura rising into the cloudless sky. At last it seemed to become intolerable. We could see him undergoing all sorts of contortions in the effort to wrest something out of his coat-pocket without raising any portion of his body above the line of cover. He himself was not

unlike a grey seal in the shadow of the rock, especially when he twisted and turned himself about without rising an inch from the surface. And in time he succeeded. We could see him slowly and carefully unfold that newspaper—probably not more than a week old—just beneath his face. He had no need of spectacles: his eyes were almost touching the page. And then we knew that he was at rest; and the hard rock and the seals all forgotten. For we took it that this local paper was one which had written a most important leading article about the proposed public park for Strathgovan, calling upon the ratepayers to arise and assert their rights and put a check on the reckless extravagance of the Commissioners. The Laird himself was openly pointed at as one who would introduce the luxury of the later Romans into a sober Scotch community; and there were obscure references to those who seemed to consider that a man's dwelling-house should become nothing more nor less than a museum of pictures and statues, while they would apply taxes raised from a hard-working population in the adornment of places of recreation for the idle. But do you think that the Laird was appalled by this fierce onslaught? Not a bit of it. He had read and re-read it to us with delight. He had triumphantly refuted the writer's sophistries; he had exposed his ignorance of the most elementary facts in political economy; he was always rejoiced to appear before Tom Galbraith and Mary Avon as one who was not afraid to suffer for his championship of art. And then, when he had triumphed over his enemy, he would fold the paper with a sort of contented sigh; and would say with a compassionate air, "Poor crayture! poor crayture!" as if the poor crayture could not be expected to know any better.

At last—at last! The Laird makes frantic gestures with his newspaper—all the more frantic that they have to be strictly lateral, and that he dares not raise

his hand. And behold! far away out there on the still, blue surface, a smooth round knob, shining and black. Without a muscle moving, eager eyes follow that distant object. The seal is not alarmed or suspicious; he sails evenly onward, seldom looking to right or left. And when he disappears there is no splash; he has had enough of breathing; he is off for his hunting in the deep seas.

What is more, he remains there. We catch no further trace of him, nor of any other living thing around those deserted bays. Human nature gives in. The Youth gets up, and boldly displays himself on a promontory, his gun over his shoulder. Then the Laird, seeing that everything is over, gets up too, yawning dreadfully, and folds his newspaper, and puts it in his pocket.

"Come along!" he calls out. "It is no use. The saints have taught the seals tricks. They know better than to come near on a working day."

And so presently the sombre party sets out again for the other side of the island, where the gig awaits us. Not a word is said. Cartridges are taken out; we pick our way through the long grass and the stones. And when it is found that Miss Avon has roughed in all that she requires of her present study, it is gloomily suggested that we might go back by way of the other island, that so haply we might secure the materials for a pigeon pie before returning to the yacht.

The evening sun was shining ruddily along the face of the cliffs as we drew near the other island; and there was no sign of life at all about the lonely shores and the tall caves. But there was another story to tell when, the various guns having been posted, the Youth boldly walked up to the mouth of the largest of the caves, and shouted. Presently there were certain flashes of blue things in the mellow evening light; and the sharp bang! bang! of the gun, that echoed into the great hollows. Hurlingham? That did

not seem much of a Hurlingham performance. There were no birds standing bewildered on the fallen trap, wondering whether to rise or not; but there were things coming whizzing through the air that resembled nothing so much as rifle bullets with blue wings. The Youth, it is true, got one or two easy shots at the mouth of the cave; but when the pigeons got outside and came flashing over the heads of the others, the shooting was, on the whole, a haphazard business. Nevertheless, we got a fair number for Master Fred's larder, after two of the men had acted as retrievers for three-quarters of an hour among the rocks and bushes. Then away again for the solitary vessel lying in the silent loch, with the pale mists stealing over the land and the red sun sinking behind the Jura hills.

Again, after dinner, amid the ghostly greys of the twilight, we went forth on another commissariat excursion, to capture fish. Strange to say, however, our Doctor, though he was learned on the subject of flies and tackle, preferred to remain on board: he had some manuscript to send off to London. And his hostess said she would remain too, she always has plenty to do about the saloon. Then we left the *White Dove* and rowed away to the rocks.

But the following conversation, as we afterwards heard, took place in our absence:—

"I wished very much to speak to you," said Angus Sutherland, to his hostess, without making any movement to bring out his desk.

"I thought so," said she; not without a little nervous apprehension.

And then she said quickly, before he could begin—

"Let me tell you at once, Angus, that I have spoken to Mary. Of course, I don't wish to intefere; I wouldn't interfere for the world; but—but I only asked her, lest there should be any unpleasant misapprehension, whether she had any reason to be offended with you. 'None in the least,' she said. She was

most positive. She even seemed to be deeply pained by the misunderstanding; and—and wished me to let you know; so you must dismiss that from your mind any way."

He listened thoughtfully, without saying anything. At last he said—

"I have determined to be quite frank with you. I am going to tell you a secret—if it is a secret——"

"I have guessed it," she said, quickly, to spare him pain.

"I thought so," he said, quite quietly. "Well; I am not ashamed of it. I have no reason to be ashamed of it. But, since you know, you will see that it would be very embarrassing for me to remain longer on board the yacht if—if there was no hope——"

He turned over the leaves of a guide-book rapidly, without looking at them; the hard-headed Doctor had not much command over himself at this moment.

"If you have guessed, why not she?" he said, in a somewhat hurried and anxious manner. "And—and—if I am to go, better that I should know at once. I—I have nothing to complain of—I mean I have nothing to reproach her with—if it is a misfortune, it is a misfortune—but—but she used to be more friendly towards me."

These two were silent. What was passing before their minds? The long summer nights in the far northern seas, with the glory dying in the west; or the moonlight walks on the white deck, with the red star of Ushinish lighthouse burning in the south; or the snug saloon below, with its cards, and candles, and laughter, and Mary Avon singing to herself the song of Ulva? She sang no song of Ulva now.

"Mary and I are very intimate friends," says the other deliberately. "I will say nothing against her. Girls have curious fancies about such things sometimes. But I must admit—for you are my friend too—that I am not surprised you should have been en-

couraged by her manner to you at one time, or that you should wonder a little at the change."

But even this mild possibility of Mary Avon's being in the wrong she feels to be incompatible with her customary championship of her friend; and so she instantly says—

"Mind, I am certain of this—that whatever Mary does, she believes to be right. Her notion of duty is extraordinarily sensitive and firm. Once she has put anything before her as the proper thing to be done, she goes straight at it; and nothing will turn her aside. And although there is something about it I can't quite understand, how am I to interfere? Interference never does any good. Why do not you ask her yourself?"

"I mean to do so, when I get the chance," said he, simply. "I merely wished to tell you that, if her answer is 'No,' it will be better for me to leave you. Already I fancy my being on board the yacht is a trouble to her. I will not be a trouble to her. I can go. If it is a misfortune, there is no one to blame."

"But if she says '*Yes!*'" cried his friend; and there was a wonderful joy in her eyes, and in her excess of sympathy she caught his hand for a moment. "Oh, Angus, if Mary were to promise to be your wife! What a trip we should have then—we should take the *White Dove* to Stornoway!"

That was her ultimate notion of human happiness—sailing the *White Dove* up to Stornoway!

"I don't think there is much hope," said he, rather absently, "from her manner of late. But anything is better than suspense. If it is a misfortune, as I say, there is no one to blame. I had not the least notion that she knew Mr. Howard Smith in London."

"Nor did she."

He stared rather.

"They may have met at our house; but certainly not more than once. You see, living in a country

house, we have to have our friends down in a *staccato* fashion, and always by arrangement of a few at a time. There is no general dropping in to afternoon tea."

"He never met her in London?" he repeated.

"I should think not."

"His uncle, then: did she never see him before?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what does he mean by treating her as a sort of familiar friend who was likely to turn up any time at Denny-mains?"

His companion coloured somewhat; for she had no right to betray confidences.

"The Laird is very fond of Mary," she said, evasively. "It is quite beautiful to see those two together."

He sate for a little time in silence; and then begged to be excused—he would go on deck to smoke. But when, some little time thereafter, we returned from our brief fishing, the dark figure walking up and down the deck was not smoking at all. He paused as the gig was hauled fast to the gangway.

"What luck?"

"About two dozen."

"All lithe?"

"About half-a-dozen mackerel."

And then he assisted Mary Avon to ascend the small wooden steps. She said "Thank you!" as she withdrew her hand from his; but the words were uttered in a low voice; and she instantly crossed to the companion and went below. He stayed on deck, and helped to swing the gig up to the davits.

Now something had got into the head of our Admiral-in-chief that night. She was very merry; and very affectionate towards Mary. She made light of her foolish wish to go away to the south. She pointed out that this continuous fine weather was only hoarding up electricity for the equinoctials; and then we should have a spin!

"We are not going to let you go, Mary; that is the

long and the short of it. And we are going to keep hold of Angus, too. He is not going away yet—no, no. We have something for him to do. We shall not rest satisfied until we see him sail the *White Dove* into Stornoway harbour!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONLY A HEADACHE.

STORNOWAY harbour, indeed! The weather was laughing at us. The glass had steadily fallen until it had got about as low as it could go with decency; and yet this next morning was more beautiful, and bright, and calm than ever! Were we to be for ever confined in this remote Loch of the Burying Place?

"Angus! Angus! where are you?" the Admiral calls out, as she comes up on deck.

"Here I am," calls out a voice in return, from the cross-trees.

She raises her head, and perceives the ruddy-faced Doctor hanging on by the ratlines.

"Where is the fine sailing weather you were to bring us—eh?"

"I have been looking for it," he replies, as he comes down the rigging; "and there is not a breath anywhere."

"Very well," she says, promptly; "I'll tell you what you must do. You must get everybody who can handle a gun into the gig and go away up to the head of the loch there, and shoot every living thing you can see. Do you understand? We are on the brink of starvation! We are perishing! Do you want us to boil tarred rope into soup?"

"No," he says humbly.

"Very well. Away you go. If you can't bring us any wind to take us into a civilised place, you must provide us with food; is that clear enough?"

Here Captain John comes aft, touching his cap.

"Good morning, mem! I was never seeing the like of this weather, mem."

"I don't want to see any more of it," she says, sharply. "Did you bring us in here because there was a convenient place to bury us in? Do you know that we are dying of starvation?"

"Oh, no, mem!" says Captain John, with a grin; but looking rather concerned all the same.

However, her attention is quickly called away by the sound of oars. She turns and regards this small boat approaching the yacht; and the more she looks the more do her eyes fill with astonishment.

"Well, I declare!" she says, "this is about the coolest thing I have seen for ages."

For it is Miss Mary Avon who is rowing the dingay back to the yacht; and her only companion is the Youth, who is contentedly seated in the stern, with his gun laid across his knees.

"Good morning, Mr. Smith!" she says, with the most gracious sarcasm. "Pray don't exert yourself too much. Severe exercise before breakfast is very dangerous."

The Youth lays hold of the rope; there is a fine blush on his handsome face.

"It is Miss Avon's fault," he says; "she would not let me row."

"I suppose she expected you to shoot? Where are the duck, and the snipe, and the golden plover? Hand them up!"

"If you want to see anything in the shape of game about this coast, you'd better wait till next Sunday," says he, somewhat gloomily.

However, after breakfast, we set out for the shallow head of the loch; and things do not turn out so badly

after all. For we have only left the yacht some few minutes when there is a sudden whirring of wings—a call of "Duck! duck!"—and the Doctor, who is at the bow, and who is the only one who is ready, fires a snap shot at the birds. Much to everybody's amazement, one drops, and instantly dives. Then begins an exciting chase. The *biorlinn* is sent careering with a vengeance; the men strain every muscle; and then another cry directs attention to the point at which the duck has reappeared. It is but for a second. Though he cannot fly, he can swim like a fish; and from time to time, as the hard pulling enables us to overtake him, we can see him shooting this way or that through the clear water. Then he bobs his head up, some thirty or forty yards off; and there is another snap-shot—the charge rattling on the water the fifth part of an instant *after* he disappears.

"Dear me!" says the Laird; "that bird will cost us ten shillings in cartridges."

But at last he is bagged. A chance shot happens to catch him before he dives; he is stretched on the water, with his black webbed feet in the air; and a swoop of Captain John's arm brings him dripping into the gig. And then our natural history is put to the test. This is no gay-plumaged sheldrake, or blue-necked mallard, or saw-toothed merganser. It is a broad-billed duck, of a sooty black and grey; we begin to regret our expenditure of cartridges; experiments on the flavour of unknown sea birds are rarely satisfactory. But Captain John's voice is authoritative and definite. "It is a fine bird," he says. And Master Fred has already marked him for his own.

Then among the shallows at the head of the loch there is many a wild pull after broods of flappers, and random firing at the circling curlew. The air is filled with the calling of the birds; and each successive shot rattles away with its echo among the silent hills. What is the result of all this noise and scramble? Not

much, indeed; for right in the middle of it we are attracted by a strange appearance in the south. That dark line beyond the yacht: is it a breeze coming up the loch? Instantly the chase after mergansers ceases; cartridges are taken out; the two or three birds we have got are put out of the way; and the Laird, taking the tiller ropes, sits proud and erect. Away go the four oars with the precision of machinery; and the long sweep sends the gig ahead at a swinging pace. Behold! behold! the dark blue on the water widening! Is it a race between the wind and the gig as to which will reach the *White Dove* first?

"Give me your oar, Fred!" says the Doctor, who is at the bow.

There is but a momentary pause. Again the shapely boat swings along; and with the measured beat of the oars comes the old familiar chorus—

. . . Cheerily, and all together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Soon the flowing breeze will blow;
We'll show the snowy canvas on her—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Wafted by the breeze of morn
We'll quaff the joyous horn together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!

"We'll beat! we'll beat!" cries the Laird, in great delight. "Give it her, boys! Not one halfpenny-worth o' that wind will we lose!"

The bow cleaves the blue water; the foam hisses away from her rudder. It is a race of the North against the South. Then the chorus again—

Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Hurrah! hurrah! As the gig is run alongside, and guns and birds handed up, that spreading blue has not quite reached the yacht; there is no appreciable stir of the lazy ensign. But there is little time to be lost. The amateurs swing the gig to the davits, while the men are getting in the slack of the anchor chain; the women are incontinently bundled below, to be out of the way of flapping sheets. Then, all hands at the halyards! And by the time the great White Wings are beginning to spread, the breeze stirs the still air around us; and the peak sways gently this way and that; and they who are hard at work at the windlass are no doubt grateful for this cool blowing from the south. Then there is a cessation of noise; we become vaguely aware that we are moving. At last the *White Dove* has spread her wings; her head is turned towards the south. Good-bye! you lonely loch, with the silent shores and the silent tombs —a hundred farewells to you, wherever we may be going!

And slowly we beat down the loch, against this light southerly breeze. But as we get further and further into the open, surely there is something in the air and in the appearance of the southern sky that suggests that the glass had not been falling for nothing. The sea is smooth; but there is a strange gloom ahead of us; and beyond the islands that we visited yesterday nothing is visible but a wan and sultry glare. Then, afar, we can hear a noise as of the approach of some storm; but perhaps it is only the low sound of the swirling of the tides round the shores. Presently another sound attracts attention—a murmured hissing, and it comes nearer and nearer; dark spots, about the size of a threepenny-piece, appear on the white decks.

The women have scarcely time to send below for their sunshades when the slight shower passes by—the decks are not even left damp. Then further and further we creep away towards the south; but where we expected to catch some far glimpse of the Irish coast—the blue line of Rathlin or the Antrim cliffs—there is only that dim, sultry haze.

Then another sound—a dull *flop! flop!*—in the distance; and the stragglers who have remained below after luncheon are hastily summoned on deck. And there, far away in the haze, we can dimly descry the successive curved forms of a school of dolphins, racing each other, and springing twenty or thirty feet in the air before they come down with that heavy thud on the water. Those of us who have watched the beautiful lithe fish racing and chasing by the side of an Atlantic vessel, would fain have been somewhat nearer; but we can only see the dim forms springing into the haze. Then the dull pistol-shots in the south slowly cease, and we are left alone on the low murmuring sea.

"But where is Miss Mary?" says the Laird, suddenly becoming aware of the absence of his chief companion.

"Oh, she is in the saloon!" says his hostess, quickly and anxiously. "She is doing something to one of her water-colours. I suppose we must not disturb her."

"No, no; certainly not," returns the Laird, lightly; and then he adds, with a smile which is meant to be very significant, "There is never any harm in hard work. Let her go on; she will have a fine collection of sketches before she leaves the *White Dove*."

But our Queen Tita does not respond to that careless joke. There is a curious, constrained look on her face; and she quite peremptorily negatives a suggestion of the Youth that he should go below for the draught-board. Then one of us perceives that Angus Sutherland is not on deck.

Has the opportunity come at last, then, for the clearing away of all secret troubles? What end is there to be to this momentous interview? Is it Stornoway harbour? Is our frank-eyed young Doctor to come up with a silent wonder and joy on his face—a message that needs no speech—a message that only says, "About with the yacht, and let us run away to the northern seas and Stornoway?" The friend of these two young people can hardly conceal her anxiety. She has got hold of the case of an opera-glass, and opens and shuts it quickly and aimlessly. Then there is a step on the companion way; she does not look; she only knows that Angus Sutherland comes on deck, and then goes forward to the bow of the gig, and stands by himself, and looks out to sea.

There is silence on board; for a low rumble of thunder has been heard once or twice, and we are listening. The mountains of Jura are dark now, and the sultry mist in the south is deeper in its gloom. This condition of the atmosphere produces a vague sense of something about to happen, which is in itself uncomfortable; one would almost like to see a flash of lightning, or hear the thunderous advance of a storm breaking in upon the oppressive calm.

The Laird goes forward to Angus Sutherland.

"Well, Doctor, and what think ye of the weather now?"

The younger man starts and turns round, and for a second looks at the Laird as if he had not quite comprehended the question.

"Oh, yes!" he says. "You are quite right. It does look as if we were going to have a dirty night."

And with that he turns to the sea again.

"Aye," says the Laird, sententiously. "I am glad we are in a boat we need have no fear of—none! Keep her away from the shore, and we are all right. But—but I suppose we will get into some harbour to-night, after all?"

"It does not matter," he says, absently; and then he goes away up to the bow. He is alone there; for the men have gone below for dinner—with the exception of John of Skye, who is at the helm.

Presently the special friend of the young man puts aside that opera-glass case, and walks timidly forward to the bow of the yacht. She regards him somewhat anxiously; but his face is turned away from her—looking over to the gloomy Jura hills.

"Angus," she says, briskly, "are we not going very near Jura, if it is West Loch Tarbert we are making for?"

He turned to her then, and she saw by his face that something had happened.

"You have spoken to her, Angus?" she said, in a low voice; and her earnest, kind eyes regarded the young man as if to anticipate his answer.

"Yes."

For a second or so he seemed disinclined to say more; but presently he added, scarcely looking at her—

"I am sorry that I must leave you the first time we get near land."

"Oh, Angus!"

It was almost a cry—uttered in that low, piteous voice. Then he looked at her.

"You have been very kind to me," said he, so that no one should hear. "It is only a misfortune. But I wish I had never seen the *White Dove*."

"Oh, Angus; don't say that!"

"It is my own fault. I should never have come from Edinburgh. I knew that. I knew I was hazarding everything. And she is not to blame——"

He could say no more, for one or two of the men now came up from the forecastle. His hostess left him and went aft, with a hurt and indignant look on her face. When the Laird asked why Miss Mary did not come on deck, she said, "I don't know," with an air

which said she had ceased to take any further care in Mary Avon's actions. And at dinner, what heed did she pay to the fact that Mary Avon was rather white, and silent, and pained-looking? She had been disappointed. She had not expected the friend of her bosom to act in this heartless manner. And as for Howard Smith, she treated that young gentleman with a cold courtesy which rather astonished him.

After dinner, when the men folk had gone on deck, and when she was preparing to go too, a timid, appealing hand was laid on her arm.

"I would like to speak to you," said the low voice of Mary Avon.

Then she turned—only for a second.

"I think I know enough of what has happened, Mary," said she; "and it would not be right for me to intermeddle. Young people are the best judges of their own affairs."

The appealing hand was withdrawn; the girl retired to the saloon, and sate down alone.

But here, on deck, an eager council of war was being held; and Angus Sutherland was as busy as any one with the extended chart—the soundings barely visible in the waning light—and proposals and counter-proposals were being freely bandied about. Night was coming on; dirty-looking weather seemed to be coming up from the south; and the mouth of West Loch Tarbert is narrow and shallow in parts, and studded with rocks—a nasty place to enter in the dark. Moreover when should we get there, beating against this south-easterly wind? What if we were to put her head round, and run for some improvised harbour among the small islands under the shadow of the Jura hills, and wait there for daylight to show us across the Sound?

There was but one dissentient. Angus Sutherland seemed oddly anxious to get to West Loch Tarbert. He would himself take the helm all night; if only the

men would take their turn at the look-out, one at a time. He was sure he could make the channel, if we reached the mouth of the loch before daylight. What! with nothing shallower on the chart than four fathoms! How could there be any danger?

But the more prudent counsels of John of Skye at length prevail, and there is a call to the men forward to stand by. Then down goes the helm; her head slews round with a rattling of blocks and cordage; the sheets of the head-sails are belayed to leeward; and then, with the boom away over the starboard davits, we are running free before this freshening breeze.

But the night is dark as we cautiously creep in under the vast shadows of the Jura hills. Fortunately in here the wind is light; the *White Dove* seems to feel her way through the gloom. All eyes are on the look-out; and there is a general shout as we nearly run on a buoy set to mark a sunken ship. But we glide by in safety; and in due course of time the roar of the anchor chain tells us that we are snug for the night.

"But where is Miss Mary?" says the Laird, in the cheerfully-lit saloon. He looks around him in an uncomfortable and unsettled way. The saloon is not the saloon when Mary Avon is out of it; here is her chair next to his as usual, but it is vacant. How are we to spend the last happy hour of chatting and joking without the pleased, bright face, and the timid, gentle, shy, dark eyes?

"Mary has gone to her cabin," says her hostess. "I suppose she has a headache."

She supposes the girl has a headache, and has not asked! And can it be really Mary Avon that she is speaking of in that cold, hurt, offended way?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE DARK.

And then the next morning the Laird is infinitely distressed.

"What! not better yet?" he says. "Dear me! I wish I could be a woman for a while, to take some tea in to her, and read to her, and coax her into better spirits. What a bad headache it must be!"

But this generous sympathy on the part of one who is little more than an acquaintance touches the heart of Mary Avon's particular friend. She reproaches herself for her cruelty. She not only gets the tea and takes it into the cabin, but she adopts a domineering tone, and declares that until the young lady begins her breakfast she will not leave the place. And then she looks at the timid, worn face; and her hand is placed gently on the hand of her friend, and she says in a lower voice—

"Mary, don't think I am angry. I am only a little bit disappointed. But I don't blame you—you could not help it. It is a pity; that is all."

The girl's face remains rather sad; but she is quite self-possessed.

"You will let me go away," she says, looking down, "when we get to some harbour?"

"There is no need," says her friend, regarding her. "Angus will leave us to-day, as soon as we get across to Cantyre."

"Oh!" she said, quickly, and looking up with a brief appeal in her eyes. "I hope not! Why should he go away? I must go; I would rather go."

"Oh, no, Mary!" her friend said. "If there is any 'must' in the matter, it is on his side; for you

know his time is very valuable, and you must have guessed why he has already far exceeded what he proposed to himself as his holiday. No, no, Mary; let us forget what has happened as soon as we can, and make the best of the rest of our sailing. The Laird would have a fit if you seriously threatened to go. And I am sure you are not to blame."

So she kissed her on the cheek, by way of reconciliation, and left. And she told the Laird that Mary had been dutiful, and had taken some breakfast, and would be up on deck in course of time.

Meanwhile, those who had gone on deck had found the *White Dove* lying in a dead calm, some three miles away from her anchorage of the previous night; her sails hanging limp; a scorching sun on the white decks, and a glare of light coming from the blue sky and the glassy blue sea.

"Well, Angus," says his hostess, very merrily—for she does not wish to let the others guess the reason of his sudden departure; "you see the weather does not approve of your leaving us. What has become of your thunderstorm? Where is the gale from the south, John?"

"I was never seeing the like of this weather, mem," said the bearded skipper. Then he added, anxiously, "And is Dr. Sutherland himself going away from the yat?"

"He would like to," she says; "but how is he ever to see land again if you banish the wind so?"

"But it will no be like this long!" says Captain John, eagerly—for he appears to think that Dr. Sutherland has got tired of the fine weather. "Oh, no, mem! I will answer for it. If Dr. Sutherland will wait another day, or two days, I am sure there will be plenty of wind. And we can lie in West Loch Tarbert for one day, or two days——"

"And starve?" she says, abruptly.

But now it appears that one or two of the men have

heard of a mysterious village lying somewhere inland from the mouth of the loch; and from a comparison of these vague rumours we gather that we may not be so far from civilisation after all. Perhaps we may once again behold loaf-bread. Visions of cutlets, fowls, grouse, and hares arise. We shall once more hear some echo of the distant world if perchance there be in the place a worn and ancient newspaper.

"Ay," said the Laird, hastily. "I would like to see a Glasgow newspaper! I'm thinking they must have got the steam fire-engine by now; and fine games the bairns will have when they begin to practise with it, skelping about in the water. It would be a grand thing to try it in the public garden when we get it; it would keep the shrubs and the borders fine and wet —eh?"

"And it would be quite as interesting as any plaster fountain," says his hostess, encouragingly.

"As handsome every bit," says the Laird, laughing heartily at his play of imagination, "as any bit laddie done up in stucco, standing on one leg, and holding up a pipe! It's a utilitarian age, ma'am—a utilitarian age; we will have instead of a fountain a steam fire-engine—very good! very good!—and they bodies who are always crying out against expenditure on decoration will be disappointed for once."

The Laird had at last discovered the whereabouts of the mysterious village on the Admiralty chart.

"But what newspaper will we get in a place hidden away like that?—out of the reach of all communication wi' the world. They'll be a century behind, mark my words. It is when ye live within a reasonable distance of a great centre of ceevilisation, like Glasgow, that ye feel the life of it stirring your own place too; and ye must keep up with the times; ye must be moving. Conservative as I am, there is no supersteetious obstinacy about me; moving—moving—that's the word. The more important the matter in the interest

of the public, the more necessary is it that we should have an impartial mind. If ye show me a new sort of asphalte, do ye think I would not examine it, jist because I recommended Jamieson and MacGregor's patent?"

He appealed boldly to his hostess.

"Oh, certainly you would!" she says, with an earnestness that might have made Jamieson and MacGregor quail.

"For three weeks," says the Laird, solemnly, "I was on that committee, until it seemed that my breakfast, and my dinner, and my supper every day was nothing but tar-smoke. What wi' the experiments without and within, I was just filled with tar-smoke. And would ye believe it, ma'am, one o' they Radical newspapers went as far as to say there were secret influences at work when Jamieson and MacGregor was decided on. My friends said, 'Prosecute the man for libel;' but I said, 'No; let the poor crayture alone; he has got to earn his living!'"

"That was very wise of you, sir," says his hostess.

"Bless me! If a man in public life were to heed everything that's said about him," observes the Laird, with a fine air of unconcern, "what would become of his time? No, no; that is not the principle on which a public man should found his life. Do your best for your fellow-creatures, and let the squabblers say what they like. As ah say, the poor wretches have to earn their living."

Here Mary Avon appeared, somewhat pale and tired-looking; and the Laird instantly went to condole with her, and to get her a deck chair, and what not. At the same moment, too, our young Doctor came along —perhaps with a brave desire to put an end to her embarrassment at once—and shook hands with her, and said, "Good morning; I hope your headache is better." Her hand was trembling as it fell away from his: and her "Yes, thank you," was almost in-

audible. Then she sate down, and the Laird resumed his discourse.

"I was once taken," said he, "by a fellow-commissioner of mine to a sort of singing place, or music hall, in Glasgow."

"What?"

"They wanted to have some such place in Strathgovan," continued the Laird, paying no heed; "and I was asked to go and see what sort of entertainment was provided in such places. It was a sorrowful sight, ma'am—a sorrowful sight; the wretched craytures on the stage laughed at their own songs, and the people not laughing at all, but given over to tobacco smoking, and whisky, and talking amongst themselves. No glint of humour—stupid, senseless stuff. But there was one young man sung a song that had a better sound in it—I cannot remember the words—but I sometimes think there was common sense in them: it was about minding your own business, and doing your own work, and letting fools say or think of ye what they please. Aye, I think there was something in that young man; though I doubt, by the look of his eyes, but he was a drinker."

He turned to Mary Avon, who had been content to be a mute and unobserved listener.

"Well, Miss Mary," said he, brightly, "and the headache is going? And are ye looking forward to getting letters and newspapers when we get back to the world? There is a post-office at that village of Clachan, John?"

"Oh, aye, sir!" said John; "there will be a post-office."

The Laird looked up at him reproachfully.

"But why cannot ye learn the English pronunciation, man? What's the necessity for ye to say *posht offus?* Cannot ye pronounce the plain English—*post oaffice?*"

"I am not very good at the English, sir," said Captain John, with a grin.

"Ye'll never learn younger."

Then he went to Mary Avon, and suggested that a walk up and down the deck might do her headache good; and when she rose he put her hand on his arm.

"Now," said he, as they started off, "I do not like headaches in young people; they are not natural. And ye may think I am very inqueesitive; but it is the privilege of old men to be talkative and inqueesitive—and I am going to ask you a question."

There was certainly no effort at keeping a secret on the part of the Laird; every one might have heard these two talking as they quietly walked up and down.

"I am going to ask ye, plump and plain, if ye are not anxious about going to London, and worrying yourself about the selling of your pictures? There now: answer mé that."

"Not very much, sir," she says, in a low voice.

Listen to me," he said, speaking in a remarkably emphatic way. "If that is on your mind, dismiss it. I tell you what: I will undertake, on my own responsibeelity, that every painting in oil, and every sketch in oil, and every water-colour drawing, and every sketch in water-colour that ye have on board this yacht, will be sold within one fortnight of your leaving the yacht. Do ye understand that?"

"You are very kind, sir."

"I am not bletherin'," said he; "no man ever knew me draw back from my word. So put that anxiety away from your mind altogether, and let us have no more troubles. I could sell—I could sell four times as many for ye in a fortnight! Bless ye, lassie, ye do not know the people in the West of Scotland yet—ye'll know them better by and by. If there's one thing they understand better than another it is a good picture; and they are ready to put their hand in their pocket. Oh! they Edinburgh bodies are very fine creetics—they have what they believe to be an elegant society in Edinburgh—and they talk a great

deal about pictures; but do they put their hand in their pocket? Ask Tom Galbraith. Ask him where he gets three-fourths of his income. He lives in Edinburgh; but he gets his income from the West of Scotland. Tom's a wise lad. He knows how to feather his nest. And when he has become independent of the picture-dealers, then he'll go to London and fight the men there on their own ground."

"I should like to see some of Mr. Galbraith's work," she said, "before I return to England."

"You will have plenty of leisure to look at them by and by," replied the Laird, quite simply. "I have some of Tom's very best things at Denny-mains."

It was not until the cool of the afternoon that a light breeze sprung up to fill up the sails of the *White Dove*, and press her gently on towards the coast of Cantyre. By this time every one on board knew that Angus Sutherland was leaving, and leaving for good.

"I hope ye will come and see me at Denny-mains, Dr. Sutherland," said the Laird, good-naturedly, "when ye happen to be in Scotland. I have a neighbour there ye would be glad to meet—a man who could talk to ye on your own subjects—Mr. Stoney."

Our Doctor paid but little heed. He was silent, and distraught. His eyes had an absent and heavy look in them.

"A most distinguished man," the Laird continued. "I am told his reputation in England is just as great as it is in this country. A very distinguished man indeed. He read a paper before the British Association not many years ago."

"About what, do you remember?" said the other, at last.

"H'm!" said the Laird, apparently puzzling his memory. "Ye see, a man in my poseetion has so much to do with the practical business of life, that perhaps he does not pay just attention to the speculations of others. But Mr. Stoney is a remarkable man;

I am astonished ye should have forgotten what the paper was about. A most able man, and a fine, logical mind; it is just beautiful to hear him point out the close fitness between the charges in the major proposeetion in the Semple case, and the averments and extracts in the minor. Ye would be greatly delighted and instructed by him, Doctor. And there's another thing."

Here the Laird looked slyly at Mary Avon.

"There's a young leddy here who has a secret of mine; and I'm thinking she has not said much about it. But I will make a public confession now: it has been on my mind for some time back that I might buy a screw yacht."

The Laird looked triumphantly around; he had forgotten that it was a very open secret.

"And wouldn't it be a strange thing if this very party, just as we are sitting now, were to be up at this very spot next year, on board that yacht?—wouldn't that be a strange thing?"

"It would be a jolly pleasant thing," said the Youth.

"You are very kind to include me in the invitation," said Angus Sutherland; but I doubt whether I shall ever be in Scotland again. My father is a very old man now; that is the only thing that would call me north. But I think I could get on better with my own work by going abroad for some years—to Naples, probably. I have to go to Italy before long, any way."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way; we did not doubt that he might pursue his researches better in Naples.

It was in the dusk of the evening that we slowly sailed into West Loch Tarbert—past a series of rocks and islands on which, as we were given to understand, seals were more abundant than limpets. But whereas the last haunt of the seals we had visited had introduced us to a solitary and desolate loch, with sterile

shores and lonely ruins, this loch, so far as we could see, was a cheerful and inhabited place, with one or two houses shining palely white amid the dark woods. And when we had come to anchor, and sent ashore, although there were no provisions to be got, the men returned with all the necessary information for Angus Sutherland. By getting up very early next morning, and walking a certain distance, he would catch a certain coach, which would take him on to Tarbert on Loch Fyne in time to catch the steamer.

And so that night, before we turned in to our respective cabins, the Doctor bade us all formally good-bye; and Mary Avon among the rest. No one could have noticed the least difference in his manner.

But in the middle of the night, in the ladies' cabin, a sound of stifled sobbing. And the other woman goes over to the berth of her companion, and bends her head down, and whispers—

"Mary, why are you crying? Tell me!"

She cannot speak for a time; her whole frame is shaken with the bitter sobs. And then she says, in a low, trembling, broken voice—

"He has not forgiven me. I saw it in his face."

CHAPTER XXXV.

TO ABSENT FRIENDS!

Next morning, however, every one perceived an extraordinary change in the appearance and manner of the girl. Mary Avon had come back to us again, with all the light and life of her face, and the contented gentleness of the soft black eyes. What had wrought the transformation? Certain confidential assurances in the silence of the night that Angus Sutherland, so far

from not forgiving her, had insisted that she was not to blame at all? Or the natural reaction after a long strain of anxiety? Or merely the welcome fresh breeze of the morning, with the cheerful, wooded shores, and the white houses shining in the sunlight? Anyhow there was quite a new expression in her face; and we heard the low, sweet laugh again. It is true that once or twice, as she walked up and down the deck with the Laird, her eyes grew pensive as she looked away along the hills on the southern shores of the loch. That was the direction in which Angus had left in the morning. And these hills were somewhat overcast; it seemed to be raining inland.

Moreover, there was something else to make our breakfast party a glad one. The two men who had rowed our young Doctor across the loch at break of day had had the curiosity to pierce inland as far as the village of Clachan; and the scouts had brought back the most glowing accounts of the Promised Land which they had discovered. They had penetrated a fertile and deeply-wooded valley; and they had at length come upon a centre of the highest civilisation. There was a post-office. There was a telegraph-office. There was a church, the clock of which struck the hours.

"Just fancy that!" exclaimed our hostess. "A clock that strikes the hours!—and a telegraph-office! We might send a telegram to ask whether the country has been invaded anywhere, or whether the Prime Minister has committed suicide."

"I would like to hear about the steam fire-engine," said the Laird almost to himself.

"However, breeze or no breeze, seals or no seals," she says, with decision, "we must stay over a day here, to have the yacht thoroughly provisioned. We cannot go on skating on the edge of tinned meats. We must have a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables, and fresh milk, and eggs and butter; and then two or

three joints are always so serviceable—cold, I mean, for luncheon; and if Fred cannot get any game, at least he must get us some fowls. What do you say, Mary? Shall we walk over to this place, and clear the way for Fred?"

"Oh, no!" says the other, lightly; "you and I are going with the seal shooters. They never get near anything; so we cannot be in the way. I assure you, sir, we shall be as quiet as mice," she adds, addressing the Laird.

"Ye will come with us, and ye will speak just as much as ye please," said the Laird, dogmatically. "What signifies a seal? The crayture is good for nothing! And the idea of you two going away by yourselves into the country! No—no; come away and get ready, Howard. If ye cannot shoot a seal with the two leddies in the boat, ye will never do it without. And the sea breezes, Miss Mary," he added, with an approving air, "are better for ye than the land breezes. Oh, aye; ye are looking just fine this morning."

A short time thereafter he was on deck, looking around him at the pleasant trees and the blue waters, when Miss Avon joined him, fully equipped for the expedition; and just at this moment they began to hear a sound of music in the stillness of the morning air. And then they perceived a rude old rowing-boat, pulled by a small boy of twelve or so, coming nearer and nearer; while another small boy of about the same age was peacefully reclining in the stern, his head thrown back so that it met the full glare of the morning sun, while he played vigorously but rather inaccurately "The Campbells are coming" on a tin whistle.

"Look at that!" said the Laird with delight; "is not that perfect happiness? Look at his pride and laziness—having another boy to pull him about, while he shows off on the penny whistle. Dear me, I wish I was that young rascal!"

"He seems happy enough," she said, with a sigh.

"That is because he does not know it," remarked the Laird, profoundly. "If you proved to him that he was happy, it would immediately vanish."

"You cannot be consciously happy; but you may be consciously unhappy—that is rather hard," said she, absently.

However, these two philosophers were withdrawn from this occult point by a summons from the Youth, who had already got the rifles and cartridges into the bow of the gig. And, indeed, as we rowed away from the yacht, in the direction of the rocks at the mouth of the loch, Miss Avon seemed determined to prove that, consciously or unconsciously, she was happy enough. She would not even allow that Angus Sutherland could have felt any pang of regret at leaving the *White Dove* and his friends.

"Poor chap!" said the Laird, with some compassion, as he turned his head and looked away towards those gloomy hills; "it must have been a lonesome journey for him this morning. And he so fond of sailing too; I'm thinking when he saw what a nice breeze there was, he was rather sorry to go away. I should not wonder if it was wi' a heavy heart that he went on board the steamer."

"Oh, no, sir! why should you think that?" said Mary Avon, quickly and anxiously. "If Dr. Sutherland had nothing to consider but yachting, he might have been sorry to go away. But think what lies before him; think what calls him! Look at the position he has won for himself already, and what is expected of him! and you would have him throw away his splendid opportunities in yachting? There is not a University in Europe where he is not known; there is not a man of science in Europe who does not expect great things of him; and—and—how proud his father must be of him!"

She spoke eagerly and almost breathlessly; there

was a pink flush in her cheek, but it was not from shamefacedness. She seemed desperately anxious to convince the Laird that our Doctor ought to have left the yacht, and must have left the yacht, and could not do anything else but leave the yacht. Meanwhile, her friend and hostess regarded her curiously.

"A man with such capacities as he has," continued the girl, warmly, "with such a great future before him, owes it to himself that he should not give way to mere sentiment. The world could not get on at all if people—I mean if the great people, from whom we expect much—were always to be consulting their feelings. Perhaps he was sorry to leave the yacht. He does like sailing; and—and I think he liked to be among friends. But what is that when he knows there is work in the world for him to do? If he was sorry at leaving the yacht, you may depend on it that that had passed away before he stepped on board the steamer. For what was that trifling sentiment compared with the consciousness that he had acted rightly?"

Something about the precision of these phrases—for the girl but rarely gave way to such a fit of earnest talking—seemed to suggest to the silent person who was watching her, that this was not the first time the girl had thought of these things.

"Idle people," said this youthful controversialist, "can afford to indulge in sentiment; but not those who have to do great things in the world. And it is not as if—Dr. Sutherland"—she always faltered the least bit just before pronouncing the name—"were only working for his own fame or his own wealth. It is for the good of mankind that he is working; and if he has to make this or that sacrifice, he knows that he is doing right. What other reward does a man need to have?"

"I am thinking of the poor old man in Banffshire," said her friend to her, thoughtfully. "If Angus goes

away to Italy for some years, they may not see each other again."

At this the girl turned strangely pale, and remained silent; but she was unnoticed, for at this moment all attention was attracted towards the seals.

There they were, no doubt, and in large numbers. We could see the occasionally moving forms, scarcely distinguishable from the brown sea-weed, on the long projecting points of the low rocks; while here and there one of the animals could be made out, poising himself in a semi-circle—head and tail in the air—like a letter O with the upper four-fifths cut off. But the problem was, how to get anywhere within shot. The rocks, or small islands, had no doubt certain eminences in the middle; but they were low and shallow all round. Obviously it was no use bearing straight down on them from our present position; so it was resolved to give them a wide berth, to pull away from the islands altogether, and then approach them from the south, if haply there might in this wise be some possibility of shelter. It was observed that Queen Titania, during these whispered and eager consultations, smiled gravely and was silent. She had been in the Highlands before.

Seals are foolish animals. We were half a mile away from them; and we were going still farther away. The rocking of the water made it impossible for us to try a haphazard shot, even if we had had a rifle that would have carried anything like 800 yards with precision. There was not the least reason for their being alarmed. But all the same, as we silently and slowly paddled away from them—actually away from them—the huge bodies one by one flopped and waddled and dropped into the water with a splash. In about a minute or so there was not a seal visible through our best binoculars. And Queen Titania calmly smiled.

But, as everybody knows, there are two sides to an

island, as to everything else. So we boldly bore down on the shores nearest us, and resolved, on getting close, on a cautious and silent landing. After many a trial we found a creek where the stern of the gig could be backed into fairly deep water, along a ledge of rock, and then two of us got out. The ladies produced their knitting materials.

With much painful stooping and crawling, we at length reached the middle ridge, and there laid down our rifles to have a preliminary peep round. That stealthy glance revealed the fact that, on the other side also, the seals had been alarmed and had left the rocks; but still they were not far away. We could see here and there a black and glistening head moving among the lapping waters. Of course it would have been madness to have risked our all on a random shot at sea. Hit or miss, the chances were about equal we should not get the seal; so we quietly retired again behind the ridge, and sate down. We could see the gig and its occupants. It seemed to one of us at least that Queen Titania was still amused.

A dead silence: while we idly regard the washed-up stores of sea-shells around us, and patiently await the return of the seals to the rocks. Then a sudden noise that makes one's heart jump: a couple of terns have discovered us, and the irate birds go wheeling and shrieking overhead with screams that would have aroused the Sleeping Beauty and all her household. In their fright and wrath they come nearer and nearer; at times they remain motionless overhead; but ever continues the shrill and piercing shriek. The face of the Youth is awful to see. Again and again he puts up his rifle; and there is no doubt that, if he were to fire, he might accomplish that feat which is more frequently heard of in novels than elsewhere—shooting a bird on the wing with a rifle. But then he is loth to throw away his last chance. With a gesture of despair he lowers his weapon, and glances towards the

gig. Queen Titania has caught his eye, and he hers. She is laughing.

At length we venture to hazard everything. Furtively each rifle is protruded over the ledge of rock; and furtively each head creeps up by the stock, the hand on the trigger-guard. The caution is unnecessary. There is not a sign of any living thing all around the shores. Even the two sea-swallows, alarmed by our moving, have wheeled away into the distance; we are left in undisturbed possession of the island. Then the Youth clambers up to the top of the rocks and looks around. A skart, perched on a far ledge, immediately takes flight—striking the water with his heavy wings before he can get well on his way: thereafter a dead silence.

"It was the tern that did that," says the Youth, moodily, as we return to the gig. "The seals must have known well enough."

"They generally do contrive to know somehow," is the answer of one who is not much disappointed, and who is still less surprised.

But this wicked woman all a-laughing, when we return to the gig!

"Come, children," says she, "we shall barely be back in time for lunch; and we shall be all the longer that Angus is not here to sing his '*Ho, ro, clansmen!*' But the quicker the sooner, as the Highlandman said. Jump in!"

"It was all owing to those sea-swallows," remarks the Youth, gloomily.

"Never mind," says she, with great equanimity. "Mary and I knew you would not shoot anything, or we should not have come. Let us hasten back to see what Fred has shot for us, with his silver sixpences."

And so we tumble into the gig; and push away, and have a long swinging pull back to the *White Dove*.

There is still some measure of justice meted out upon the earth. The face of this fiend who has been

laughing at us all the morning becomes a trifle more anxious when she draws near the yacht. For there is Master Fred idling up at the bow, instead of being below looking after the vast stores he has got on board; and moreover as we draw near, and as he comes along to the gangway, any one can perceive that our good Frederick d'or is not in a facetious frame of mind.

"Well, Fred, have you got a good supply at last?" she cries, taking hold of the rope, and putting her foot on the step.

Fred mumbles something in reply.

"What have you got?" she says, when she is on deck. "Any game?"

"No, mem."

"Oh, never mind; the fowls will do very well."

Fred is rather silent, until he explains that he could not get any fowls.

"No fowls? What butcher's meat, then?" says she, somewhat indignantly.

"None."

"None? Nothing?" says she; and a low titter begins to prevail among the assembled crowd. "Have you not got a joint of any sort?"

Fred is almost unwilling to confess—he is ashamed, angry, disconcerted. At last he blurts out—

"I could get nothing at all, mem, but fower loaves."

At this there was a roar of laughter. What had become of all her fresh milk, and butter, and eggs; her mutton, and fowls, and cutlets; her grouse, and snipe, and hares? We did not care for our privation; we only rejoiced in her discomfiture.

"That is just like a Scotch village," says she, savagely; "spending all its money on a church bell, and not able to keep a decent shop open! Do you mean to say you could not get a carrot, or a cabbage, or a pennyworth of milk?"

"No, mem."

"John," she says, in a domineering way, "why *don't* you get the sails up? What is the use of staying in a place like this?"

John comes forward timidly, and stroking his great beard: he half believes in these furious rages of hers.

"Oh, yes, mem, if ye please, mem, I will get the sail set—but—but the tide will be turning soon, mem, and the wind, she will be against us as soon as we get out of the loch; and it will be a long, long time before we get to Crinan. I not well aquent with this place, mem: if we were up in our own part of the Highlands, do you think the people would let the *White Dove* be so long without the fresh cabbage and the milk? No; I not think that, mem."

"But we are not in our own part of the Highlands," says she, querulously; "and do you think we are going to starve? However, I suppose Fred can give us a biscuit. Let us go below."

Our lunch was, in truth, simple enough; but perhaps it was this indirect appeal to Fred that determined that worthy to surprise us at dinner that evening. First of all, after we had returned from another ineffectual seal-hunt, we found he had decorated the dinner-table in an elaborate manner. There was a clean cloth, shining with the starch in it. There was a great dish of scarlet rowans in the middle of the table; and the rowans had a border of white heather—gathered at Loch-na-Chill: the rowans were for lovely colour, the heather was for luck. Then, not content with that, he had put all our available silver on the table, including the candlesticks and the snuffer-tray, though the sun had not yet sunk behind the Jura hills. But the banquet defies description. The vast basin of steaming kidney soup, the boiled lithe, the fried mackerel, the round of tongue, the corned beef, the tomatoes, the pickles, the sardines, the convolutions of pudding and apricot jam: what Fishmonger or Dry-

salter or Gunmaker could have wanted more? Nor was there any Apemantus at the feast; there was the smiling and benign countenance of the Laird, who again and again made facetious remarks about the kirk bell of Clachan. Then he said more formally—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to ask ye to drink a toast."

"Oh, uncle!" said the Youth deprecatingly: "we are not at a commissioners' meeting at Strathgovan."

"And I will thank ye to fill your glasses," said the Laird, taking no heed of Young England and his modern want of manners. "I have to ask ye, ladies and gentlemen, to drink the health of one who is an old and valued friend of some of us, who is admired and respected by us all. It would ill become us, now that he has been separated from us but by a day, that we should forget him in his absence. We have come in close contact with him; we have seen his fine qualities of temper and character; and I am sure no one present will contradict me when I say that, great as are his abeelities, they are not more remarkable than his modesty, and his good humour, and his simple, plain, frank ways. With a man of less solid judgment, I might be afraid of certain dangerous tendencies of these times; but our friend has a Scotch head on his shoulders; he may be dazzled by their newfangled speculations, but not convinced—not convinced. It is a rare thing—I will say it, though I am but a recent acquaintance, and do not know him as well as some now at this hospitable board—to find such powers of intellect united with such a quiet and unassuming manliness. Ladies and gentlemen, I give ye the health of Dr. Angus Sutherland. We regret that he has gone from us; but we know that duty calls, and we honour the man who stands to his guns. It may be that we may see him in these waters once more; it may be that we may not; but whatever may be in store for him or for us, we know he will be worthy of

the hopes we build on him, and we drink his health now in his absence, and wish him God-speed!"

"Hear! hear!" cried the Youth, who was greatly amused by this burst of old-fashioned eloquence. But Mary Avon sate white and trembling, and quite forgot to put the glass to her lips. It was her hostess who spoke next, with a laugh.

"I think, sir," said she, "I might give you a hint. If you were to go up on deck and ask the men whether they would like to drink Angus's health, I don't think they would refuse."

"It is a most capital suggestion," said the Laird, rising to take down his wideawake.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SUSPICIONS.

It was handsomely done on the part of the Laird to pay that tribute to his vanquished and departed enemy. But next morning, as we were getting under weigh, he got a chance of speaking to his hostess alone; and he could not quite forego a little bit of boasting over his superior astuteness and prescience.

"What did I say, ma'am," he asked, with a confident chuckle, "when ye made a communication to me on the subject of our friend who has just left us? Did I not offer to make ye a wager, though I am but little of a gambler? A gold ring, a sixpence, and a silver thimble: did I not offer to wager ye these three articles that your guesses were not quite correct? And what has become of Dr. Sutherland now?"

His hostess is not in this gay humour. She answers with a touch of reserve—

"If I made any mistake, it was about Mary. And

I had no right to suspect anything, for she never took me into her confidence; and I did not approve of elderly people prying into the affairs of young people."

"Pry?" says the Laird loftily and graciously. "No, no; no prying. But judgment?—is there any harm in one keeping one's eyes open? And did not I tell ye, ma'am, to be of good heart—that everything would go properly and smoothly?"

"And has it?" she says, sharply, and looking up with a glance of indignation.

The Laird, however, is so wrapped up in his own thoughts that he does not notice this protest.

"She *is* a fine lass, that," he says, with decision. "Did ye ever hear a young girl speak such clear common sense as she spoke yesterday, about that very Doctor? There is no affected sentiment—there is nothing of your Clarinda and Philander noavel-writing—about that lass: did ye ever hear such good, sound, clear common sense?"

"I heard her," says his hostess, shortly.

By this time we had weighed anchor, and the *White Dove* was slowly sailing down the loch, before a light northerly breeze. Then Mary Avon came on deck, followed by the attentive Youth. And while everybody on board was eagerly noticing things ahead—the seals on the rocks at the mouth of the loch, the windy grey sea beyond, and the blue mountains of Jura—Mary Avon alone looked backward, to the low lines of hills we were leaving. She sate silent and apart.

The Laird stepped over to her.

"We have just been talking about the Doctor," says he, cheerfully. "And we were saying there was plenty of good common sense in what ye said yesterday about his duties and his prospects. Oh, ay! But then ye ken, Miss Mary, even the busiest and the wisest of men must have their holiday at times; and I have just been thinking that, if we can get Dr. Sutherland to come with us next year, we will, maybe, surprise him

by what ye can do wi' a steam yacht. Why, during the time we have been lying here we might have run across to Ireland and back in a steam yacht! It is true there would be less enjoyment for him in the sailing; but still there are compensations."

His hostess has overheard all this. She says, in her gentle way, but with a cold and cruel clearness—

"You know, sir, that is quite impossible. Angus will not be in Scotland for many a day to come."

The girl's face is hidden; apparently she is still gazing back on those slowly receding hills.

"Toots! toots!" says the Laird, briskly. "The lad is not a fool. He will make an occasion if he considers it desirable: there is no compulsion that he must remain in Eetaly. I think I would even lay a wager that we will have just the same party, and the Doctor included, on that steam yacht next year, and in this very place: is it a wager, ma'am?"

"I am afraid you must leave us out," she remarks, "at all events. And as for Angus Sutherland, I shall be surprised if ever he sees West Loch Tarbert again."

Why had not Mary Avon spoken? The Laird went a step nearer her, and put his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Well, Miss Mary," said he; "what are we to do to show these people their folly and wickedness—eh? I think I will leave it to you."

"Oh, no, sir!" This, or something like this, she was understood to say, in a low voice; but at the same moment she rose quickly, crossed the deck, put a trembling hand on the companion way, and went below. Just as she disappeared, she could not quite conceal her face; and there was a look on it that startled the Laird. Had the girl been stealthily crying all the time she had been looking back at those distant hills?

The Laird was greatly disturbed. He said nothing, for he would not have it understood that anything

had happened; but any one could see by his preoccupied manner that he was seriously troubled. He had directed a quick, sharp glance of surprise and inquiry at his hostess; but just then she was stepping aside to get out of the way of Captain John. The Laird sate down by himself and remained in a profound silence. He seemed to pay no attention to what was going on.

But there was brisk work enough all over the yacht. For now we had got clear of the long promontory and its islands; and out here in the open there was a pretty heavy sea running, while the wind began to freshen up a bit. There was a squally look about the sea and sky; it was considered prudent to lower the topsail. Now and again there was a heavy shock at the bows, and then a dipping of heads to dodge the flying shreds of spray. In the midst of all this Miss Avon appeared again.

"I thought we should catch it," said she, in the blithest of tones; and she addressed herself particularly to the Laird. "And it is better to be prepared. But, oh dear me! what a nuisance a waterproof is!"

And indeed the wind was blowing that hooded and caped garment all about her head, so that her dark hair was becoming considerably dishevelled. The Youth came to her assistance; put a cushion and a shawl for her just beside her hostess, under the lee of the weather bulwarks; then she snugly ensconced herself there, and seemed to be very merry and happy indeed.

"Don't you often wish you were a fish when the weather is wet?" she says, gaily, to her friend; "so that you might be perfectly indifferent?" And here she cries "Oh!" again, because a drop or two of spray has come flying past the keel of the gig and just caught her on the crown of her waterproof.

Nothing can exceed her talk, her laughter, her cheerfulness. She nestles close to her friend; she is

like a spoiled child; she makes fun of the Youth's attempts to steer. And the Laird is regarding her with a grave wonder—perhaps with some dark suspicion—when she lightly addresses herself to him again:

"But what about that strong man, sir? You were going to tell us the story yesterday, when you were interrupted."

It was a cunning device. How could a professed story-teller refuse to rise to the bait? The watchfulness disappeared from the face of the Laird: in its place a sort of anticipatory laughter began to shine.

"But it was Tom Galbraith heard of that man," said he, in a deprecating way. "Did I not tell ye? Oh, ay! it was Tom Galbraith heard of him when he was in Ross-shire; and it was he told me of the wonderful things that man could do, according to the natives. Did not I tell ye of his rolling an enormous stone up a hill, and of the stone being split into nine pieces; yet not any one man could roll up one of the nine pieces? But I was going to tell ye of his being in Prince's Street, Edinburgh; and a coach and four was coming whirling along; the horses had run away, and no one could stop them. M'Kinlay was walking along the street, when the people called to him to look out, for the four horses were running mad; but the Ross-shire Samson was not afraid. No, no——"

Here a wisp of spray somewhat disconcerted the Laird; but only for a moment. He wiped the salt water from the side of his neck, and continued, with suppressed laughter bubbling up in his eyes.

"The man that told Tom Galbraith," said he, "was a solemn believer, and spoke with reverence. 'M'Kinlay,' says he, 'he will turn to the street, and he will grab at the four horses and the coach, and he will took them up in his two hands—*shist like a mice.*'"

"*Shist like a mice.*" The Laird preserved a stern silence. The humour of this story was so desperately occult that he would leave the coarse applause to us.

Only there was an odd light in his eyes; and we knew that it was all he could do to prevent his bursting out into a roar of laughter. But Mary Avon laughed—until John of Skye, who had not heard a word, grinned out of pure sympathy.

"He must have been the man," said Miss Avon, diffidently—for she did not like to encroach on the Laird's province—"whom Captain John told me about, who could drink whisky so strong that a drop of it would burn a white mark on a tarred rope."

But the Laird was not jealous.

"Very good—very good!" he cried, with extreme delight. "Excellent—a real good one! 'Deed I'll tell that to Tom Galbraith!"

And the high spirits and the facetiousness of these two children continued through lunch. That was rather a wild meal, considering that we were still sawing across the boisterous Sound of Jura, in the teeth of a fresh northerly breeze. However, nothing could exceed the devotion of the Youth, who got scarcly any luncheon at all in his efforts to control the antics of pickle jars and to bolster up bottles. Then when everything was secure, there would be an ominous call overhead, "*Stand by forrard, boys!*" followed by a period of frantic revolution and panic.

"Yes," continued the Laird, when we got on deck again; "a sense of humour is a great power in human affairs. A man in public life without it is like a ship without a helm: he is sure to go and do something redeeclous that a smaller man would have avoided altogether. Ay, my father's sense of humour was often said by people to be quite extraordinar'—quite extraordinar'. I make no pretensions that way myself."

Here the Laird waved his hand, as if to deprecate any courteous protest.

"No, no; I have no pretensions that way; but sometimes a bit joke comes in verra well when ye are

dealing with solemn and pretentious asses. There is one man in Strathgovan——"

But here the Laird's contempt of this dull person could not find vent in words. He put up both hands, palm outwards, and shook them, and shrugged his shoulders.

"A most desperately stupid ass, and as loquacious as a parrot. I mind fine when I was giving my earnest attention to the subject of our police system. I may tell ye, ma'am, that our burgh stretches over about a mile each way, and that it has a population of over 8000 souls, with a vast quantity of valuable property. And up till that time we had but two policemen on duty at the same time during the night. It was my opeenion that that number was quite inadequate; and I stated my opeenion at a meeting of the commissioners convened for that purpose. Well, would ye believe it, this meddlesome body, Johnny Guthrie, got up on his legs and preached and preached away; and all that he had to tell us was that we could not add to the number of police without the consent of the Commissioners of Supply and the Home Secretary. Bless me! what bairn is there but knows that? I'll be bound Miss Mary there, though she comes from England, would know as much about public affairs as that?"

"I—I am afraid not, sir," said she.

"No matter—no matter. Live and learn. When ye come to Strathgovan, we'll begin and teach ye. However, as I was saying, this bletherin' poor crayture went on and on, and it was all about the one point, until I got up and, 'Mr. Provost,' says I, 'there are some human beings it would be idle to answer. Their loquacity is a sort of function; they perspire through their tongue—like a doag.' Ye should have have seen Johnny Guthrie's face after that!"

And here the Laird laughed and laughed again at Johnny Guthrie's discomfiture.

"But he is a poor bletherin' crayture," he continued, with a kind of compassion. "Providence made him what he is: but sometimes I think Johnny tries to make himself even more rideeklous than Providence could fairly and honestly have intended. He attacked me most bitterly because I got a committee appointed to represent to the Post-master that we should have a later delivery at night. He attacked me most bitterly; and yet I think it was one of the greatest reforms ever introduced into our Burgh."

"Oh, indeed, sir?" says his hostess, with earnest attention.

"Yes, indeed. The Postmaster is a most civil, worthy, and respectable man, though it was a sore blow to him when his daughter took to going to the Episcopal Church in Glasgow. However, with his assistance we now get the letters that used to be delivered in the forenoon delivered late the night before; and we have a mail made up at 10 P.M., which is a great convenience. And that man Johnny Guthrie gabbling away as if the French Revolution were coming back on us! I am a Conservative myself, as ye know, ma'am: but I say that we must march with the times. No standing still in these days. However, ye will get Johnny Guthries everywhere; poor bletherin' craytures who have no capacity for taking a large view of public affairs—bats and blindworms as it were: I suppose there is a use for them, as it has pleased Providence to create them; but it would puzzle an ordinary person to find it out."

With much of the like wise discourse did the Laird beguile our northward voyage; and apparently he had forgotten that little incident about Mary Avon in the morning. The girl was as much interested as any one; laughed at the "good ones;" was ready to pour her contempt on the Johnny Guthrie who opposed the projects of the Laird's statesmanship. And in this manner we fought our way against the stiff northerly

breeze, until evening found us off the mouth of Loch Crinan. Here we proposed to run in for the night, so that we should have daylight and a favourable tide to enable us to pass through the Dorus Môr.

It was a beautiful, quiet evening in this sheltered bay; and after dinner we were all on deck, reading, smoking, and what not. The Laird and Mary Avon were playing chess together. The glow of the sunset was still in the western sky, and reflected on the smooth water around us; though Jura and Scarba were of a dark, soft, luminous rose-purple.

Chess is a silent game; the Laird was not surprised that his companion did not speak to him. And so absorbed was he with his knights and bishops that he did not notice that, in the absolute silence of this still evening, one of the men forward was idly whistling to himself the sad air of Lochaber.

Lochaber no more! And Lochaber no more!
We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more!

It was the old and familiar refrain: Hector of Moidart was probably not thinking of Lochaber at all.

But suddenly the Laird, staring down at the board, perceived some little tiny thing drop on the farther edge from him; and he quickly looked up. The girl was crying. Instantly he put out his great hand and took hers, and said, in a low voice, full of gentleness and a tender sympathy—

"Dear me, lassie, what is the matter?"

But Mary Avon hastily pulled out her handkerchief and passed it across her eyes, and said hurriedly—

"Oh, I beg your pardon! it is nothing: I—I was thinking of something else. And is it your move or mine, sir?——"

The Laird looked at her; but her eyes were cast down. He did not pay so much attention to the game after that.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CERTAINTY.

NEXT morning there is a lively commotion on board. The squally, blustering-looking skies, the glimpses of the white horses out there on the driven green sea, and the fresh northerly breeze that comes in gusts and swirls about the rigging—all tell us that we shall have some hard work before we pierce the Dorus Môr.

"You won't want for wind to-day, Captain John," says the Youth, who is waiting to give the men a hand at the windlass.

"'Deed, no," says John of Skye, with a grim smile. "This is the kind of day that Dr. Sutherland would like, and the *White Dove* going through the Dorus Môr too!"

However, the Laird seems to take no interest in what is going forward. All the morning he has been silent and preoccupied; occasionally approaching his hostess, but never getting an opportunity of speaking with her alone. At last, when he observes that every one is on deck, and eagerly watching the *White Dove* getting under weigh, he covertly and quietly touches our Admiral on the arm.

"I would speak to ye below for a moment, ma'am," he says, in a whisper.

And so, unnoticed amid all this bustle, she follows him down into the saloon, wondering not a little. And as soon as he has shut the door, he plunges *in medias res.*

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; but I must speak to ye. It is about your friend, Miss Mary: have ye not observed that she is sorely troubled about something —though she puts a brave face on it and will not

acknowledge it? Have ye not seen it—have ye not guessed that she is grievously troubled about some matter or other?"

"I have guessed it," said the other.

"Poor lass! poor lass!" said the Laird; and then he added, thoughtfully, "It is no small matter that can affect so light-hearted a creature: that is what I want to ask ye. Do ye know? Have ye guessed? Surely it is something that some of us can help her wi'. Indeed, it just distresses me beyond measure to see that trouble in her face; and when I see her try to conceal it—and to make believe that everything is well with her—I feel as if there was nothing I would not do for the poor lass."

"But I don't think either you or I can help. Young people must manage their affairs for themselves," says his hostess, somewhat coldly.

"But what is it?—what is it? What is troubling her?"

Queen Titania regards him for a moment, apparently uncertain as to how far she should go. At last she says—

"Well; I am not revealing any confidence of Mary's; for she has told me nothing about it. But I may as well say at once that when we were in West Loch Tarbert, Dr. Sutherland asked her to be his wife; and she refused him. And now I suppose she is breaking her heart about it."

"Dear me! dear me!" says the Laird, with eyes opened wide.

"It is always the way with girls," says the other, with a cruel cynicism. "Whether they say 'Yes' or 'No' they are sure to cry over it. And naturally; for whether they say 'Yes' or 'No,' they are sure to have made an irretrievable blunder."

The Laird is slowly recovering from his first shock of surprise.

"But if she did refuse him, surely that is what any

one would have expected? There is nothing singular in that."

"Pardon me; I think there is something very singular," she says, warmly. "I don't see how any one could have been with these two up in the north, and not perceived that there was an understanding between them. If any girl ever encouraged a man, she did. Why, sir, when you proposed that your nephew should come with us, and make love to Mary, I said 'Yes' because I thought it would be merely a joke! I thought he would please you by consenting, and not harm anybody else. But now it has turned out quite different; and Angus Sutherland has gone away."

And at this there was a return of the proud and hurt look into her eyes: Angus was her friend; she had not expected this idle boy would have supplanted him.

The Laird was greatly disturbed. The beautiful picture that he had been painting for himself during this summer idleness of ours—filling in the details with a lingering and loving care—seemed to fade away into impalpable mist; and he was confronted by blank chaos. And this, too, just at the moment when the departure of the Doctor appeared to render all his plans doubly secure.—He rose.

"I will think over it, ma'am," he said, slowly. "I am obliged to ye for your information: perhaps I was not as observant as I should have been."

Then she sought to stay him for a moment.

"Don't you think, sir," said she, timidly, "it would be better for neither you nor me to interfere?"

The Laird turned.

"I made a promise to the lass," said he, quite simply, "one night we were in Loch Leven, and she and I were walking on the deck, that when she was in trouble I would try to help her; and I will not break my promise through any fear of being called an intermeddler. I will go to the girl myself—when I have

the opportunity; and if she prefers to keep her own counsel—if she thinks I am only an old Scotch fool who should be minding my own business—I will not grumble."

And again he was going away, when again she detained him.

"I hope you do not think I spoke harshly of Mary," said she, penitentially. "I own that I was a little disappointed. And it seemed so certain. But I am sure she has sufficient reason for whatever she has done—and that she believes she is acting rightly——"

"Of that there is no doubt," said he, promptly. "The girl has just a wonderful clear notion of doing what she ought to do; and nothing would make her flinch." Then he added, after a second, "But I will think over it; and then go to herself. Perhaps she feels lonely, and does not know that there is a home awaiting her at Denny-mains."

So both of them went on deck again; and found that the *White Dove* was already sailing away from the Trossachs-like shore of Loch Crinan, and getting further out into this squally green sea. There were bursts of sunlight flying across the rocks and the white-tipped waves; but ordinarily the sky was overcast, masses of grey and silvery cloud coming swinging along from the north.

Then the Laird showed himself discreet "before folk." He would not appear to have any designs on Mary Avon's confidences. He talked in a loud and confident fashion to John of Skye, about the weather, and the Dorus Môr, and Corrievrechan. Finally, he suggested, in a facetious way, that as the younger men had occasionally had their turn at the helm, he might have his now, for the first time.

"If ye please, sir," said Captain John, relinquishing the tiller to him with a smile of thanks, and going forward to have a quiet pipe.

But the Laird seemed a little bit confused by the

rope which John had confided to him. In a light breeze, and with his hand on the tiller, he might have done very well; but this looped rope, to which he had to cling so as to steady himself, seemed puzzling. And almost at the same time the *White Dove* began to creep up to the wind; and presently the sails showed an ominous quiver.

"Keep her full, sir!" called John of Skye, turning round.

But instead of that the sails flapped more and more; there was a rattling of blocks; two men came tumbling up from the forecastle, thinking the yacht was being put about.

"Shove your hand from ye, sir!" called out the skipper to the distressed steersman; and this somewhat infantine direction soon put the vessel on her course again.

In a few minutes thereafter John of Skye put his pipe in his waistcoat pocket.

"We'll let her about now, sir," he called to the Laird.

The two men who happened to be on deck went to the jib-sheets; John himself leisurely proceeded to stand by the weather fore-sheet. Then, as the Laird seemed still to await further orders, he called out—

"Helm hard down, sir, if ye please!"

But this rope bothered the Laird. He angrily untwisted it, let it drop on the deck, and then with both hands endeavoured to jam the tiller towards the weather bulwarks, which were certainly nearer to him than the lee bulwarks.

"The other way, sir!" Mary Avon cried to him, anxiously.

"Bless me! bless me! Of course!" he cried, in return; and then he let the tiller go, and just managed to get out of its way as it swung to leeward. And then as the bow sheered round, and the *White Dove* made away for the mouth of Loch Craignish on the

port tack, he soon discovered the use of the weather tiller rope, for the wind was now blowing hard, and the yacht pitching a good deal.

"We are getting on, Miss Mary!" he cried to her, crushing his wideawake down over his forehead. Have ye not got a bit song for us? What about the two sailors that pitied all the poor folk in London?"

She only cast down her eyes, and a faint colour suffused her cheeks: our singing-bird had left us.

"Howard, lad!" the Laird called out again, in his facetious manner, "ye are not looking well, man. Is the pitching too much for you?"

The Youth was certainly not looking very brilliant; but he managed to conjure up a ghastly smile.

"If I get ill," said he, "I will blame it on the steering."

"'Deed, ye will not," said the Laird, who seemed to have been satisfied with his performances. "I am not going to steer this boat through the Dorus Môr. Here, John, come back to your post!"

John of Skye came promptly aft; in no case would he have allowed an amateur to pilot the *White Dove* through this narrow strait with its swirling currents. However, when the proper time came we got through the Dorus Môr very easily, there being a strong flood tide to help us; and the brief respite under the lee of the land allowed the Youth to summon back his colour and his cheerfulness.

The Laird had ensconced himself beside Mary Avon; he had a little circle of admiring listeners; he was telling us, amid great shouts of laughter, how Homesh had replied to one tourist, who had asked for something to eat, that that was impossible, "bekass ahl the plates was cleaned;" and how Homesh had answered another tourist, who represented that the towel in the lavatory was not as it should be, that "more than fifty or sixty people was using that towel this very day, and not a complaint from any one of them;" and how

Homesh, when his assistant stumbled and threw a leg of mutton on to the deck, called out to him in his rage, "Ye young teffle, I will knock the stairs down your head!" We were more and more delighted with Homesh and his apocryphal adventures.

But now other things than Homesh were claiming our attention. Once through the Dorus, we found the wind blowing harder than ever, and a heavy sea running. The day had cleared, and the sun was gleaming on the white crests of the waves; but the air was thick with whirled spray, and the decks were running wet. The *White Dove* listed over before the heavy wind, so that her scuppers were a foot deep in water; while opening the gangway only relieved the pressure for a second or two; the next moment a wave would surge in on the deck. The jib and fore-staysail were soaked half-mast high. When we were on the port tack the keel of the gig ploughed the crests of those massive and rolling waves. This would, indeed, have been a day for Angus Sutherland.

On one tack we ran right over to Corrievrechan; but we could see no waterspouts or other symptoms of the whirling currents; we could only hear the low roar all along the Scarba coast, and watch the darting of the white foam up the face of the rocks. And then away again on the port tack; with the women clinging desperately to the weather bulwarks, lest perchance they should swiftly glide down the gleaming decks into the hissing water that rolled along the lee scuppers. Despite the fact of their being clad from top to toe in waterproofs, their faces were streaming with the salt water; but they were warm enough, for the sun was blazing hot, and the showers of spray were like showers of gleaming diamonds.

Luncheon was of an extremely pantomimic character; until, in the midst of it, we were alarmed by hearing quick tramping overhead, and noise and shouting. The Youth was hastily bidden to leave his pickle jars,

and go on deck to see what was happening. In a second or two he returned—somewhat grueful—his hair wild—his face wet.

"They are only taking in the mizen," says he; "but my cap has been knocked overboard, and I have got about a quart of water down my neck."

"It will do ye good, lad," observed the Laird, in the most heartless manner; "and I will now trouble ye to pass me the marmalade."

Patiently, all day long, we beat up against that inexorable north wind, until, in the afternoon, it veered a point or two to the east, which made an appreciable difference in our rate of progress. Then, the farther the wind veered, the more it became a land wind; and the sea abated considerably: so that long before we could make out Castle Osprey on the face of the hill, we were in fairly calm waters, with a light breeze on our starboard beam. The hot sun had dried the decks; there was a possibility of walking; some went below to prepare for going ashore.

We were returning to the world of telegrams, and letters, and newspapers; we should soon know what the Commissioners of Strathgovan were doing, and whether Johnny Guthrie had been fomenting sedition.

But it was not these things that troubled the Laird. He had been somewhat meditative during the afternoon. At last, finding an occasion on which nearly everybody was below but his hostess, he said to her, in a low voice—

"The more I reflect on that matter we spoke of this morning, the more I am driven to a conclusion that I would fain avoid. It would be a sad blow to me. I have built much on the scheme I was telling ye of: perhaps it was but a toy; but old people have a fondness for their toys as well as young people."

"I don't quite understand you, sir," said the other.

"We will soon learn whether I am right," said the

old Laird, with a sigh; and then he turned to her and regarded her.

"I doubt whether ye see this girl's character as clearly as I do," said he. "Gentle, and soft, delicate as she seems to be, she is of the stuff the martyrs in former days were made of: if she believes a thing to be right, she will do it, at any cost or sacrifice. Do ye mind the first evening I met her at your house—how she sate and talked, and laughed, with her sprained ankle swollen and black all the time, just that she might not interfere with the pleasure of others?"

The Laird paused for a moment or two.

"I have been putting things together," he continued—but he did not seem proud or boastful of his perspicacity: perhaps he would rather have fought against the conclusion forced on him. "When she was up in the north, it seemed to you as if she would have married the young man Sutherland?"

"Most undoubtedly."

"The lass had her bit fortune then," said the Laird, thoughtfully. "Not much, as ye say; but it would have been an independence. It would have helped him in the world; it would have left him free. And she is proud of what he has done, and as ambeetious as himself that he should become a great man. Ay?"

The Laird seemed very anxious about the varnishing of the gig; he kept smoothing it with his forefinger.

"And when he came to her the other day—it is but a guess of mine, ma'am—she may have said to herself beforehand that she would not be a drag on him, that she would leave him free to become great and famous, that the sentiment of the moment was a trifling thing compared to what the world expected from Dr. Sutherland. Ye will not forget what she said on that point only the other day. And she may have sent him away—with her own heart just like to break. I have just been putting one or two possibeelities together, ma'am——"

The colour had forsaken the cheeks of the woman who stood by his side.

"And—and—if she was so cruel—and, and heartless—and, and monstrous—she ought to be horsewhipped!" she exclaimed quite breathlessly, and apparently not knowing what she was saying.

But the Laird shook his head.

"Poor lass! poor lass!" he said, gently; "she has had her troubles. No doubt the loss of her bit fortune seemed a desperate thing to her; and you know her first anxiety is conteenually for other people—particularly them that have been kind to her—and that she thinks no more of herself than if she had no feelings at all. Well, ma'am, if what I am guessing at is true—it is only a speculation o' mine, and I am far from sure; but if that is all that has to be put right, I'm thinking it might be put right. We should thank God that we are now and again able to put some small matter straight in the world."

The Laird was more busy than ever with the varnish, and he went nearer the boat. His fingers were nervous, and there was a strange sad look in the sunken grey eyes.

"Poor lass! if that is all her trouble, it might not be difficult to help her," said he; and then he added slowly—and the woman beside him knew, rather than saw, that the sad grey eyes were somehow wet—"But I had thought to see her living at Denny-mains: it was—it was a sort of toy of my old age."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A PARABLE.

Now we had not been five minutes within the walls of Castle Osprey when great shouts of laughter were heard in the direction of the library; and presently the Laird came quickly into the room where the two women were standing at the open window. He was flourishing a newspaper in his hand; delight, sarcasm, and desperate humour shone in his face. He would not notice that Queen Titania looked very much inclined to cry, as she gazed out on the forlorn remains of what had once been a rose-garden; he would pay no heed to Mary Avon's wan cheek and pensive eyes.

"Just listen to this, ma'am, just listen to this," he called out briskly; and all the atmosphere of the room seemed to wake up into cheerfulness and life. "Have I not told ye often about that extraordinary body, Johnny Guthrie? Now just listen!"

It appeared that the Laird, without even bestowing a glance on the pile of letters lying waiting for him, had at once dived into the mass of newspapers, and had succeeded in fishing out the report of the last meeting of the Strathgovan Police Commissioners. With a solemnity that scarcely veiled his suppressed mirth, he said—

"Just listen, ma'am: 'The fortnightly meeting of the Strathgovan Police Commissioners was held on Monday, Provost McKendrick in the chair. Mr. Robert Johnstone said he had much pleasure in congratulating the chairman and the other gentlemen assembled on the signal and able manner in which the fire brigade had done their duty on the previous Saturday at the great conflagration in Coulterside buildings; and he

referred especially to the immense assistance given by the new fire-engine recently purchased by the commissioners. (Hear! hear!) He could assure the meeting that but for the zealous and patriotic ardour of the brigade—aided, no doubt, by the efficient working of the steam-engine—a most valuable property would have been devoted *holus bolus* to the flames.'"

The Laird frowned at this phrase.

"Does the crayture think he is talking Latin?" he asked, apparently of himself.

However, he continued his reading of the report—

"'Provost McKendrick, replying to these observations, observed that it was certainly a matter for congratulation that the fire brigade should have proved their efficiency in so distinct a manner, considering the outlay that had been incurred; and that now the inhabitants of the Burgh would perceive the necessity of having more plugs. So far all the money had been well spent. Mr. J. Guthrie'"—but here the Laird could not contain his laughter any longer.

"That's the Johnny, ma'am," he cried, in explanation, "that's the Johnny Guthrie I was telling ye about—the poor, yaumering, pernickity, querulous crayture! 'Mr. J. Guthrie begged to say he could not join in these general felicitations. They were making a great deal of noise about nothing. The fire was no fire at all; a servant-girl could have put it out with a pail. He had come from Glasgow by the eleven o'clock 'bus, and there was then not a trace of a fire to be seen. The real damage done to the property was not done by the fire, but by the dirty water drawn by the fire brigade from the Coulter-burn, which dirty water had entirely destroyed Mrs. MacInnes's best bed-room furniture.'"

The Laird flourished the newspaper, and laughed aloud in his joy; the mere reading of the extract had so thoroughly discomfited his enemy.

"Did ye ever hear the like o' that body?" he cried.

"A snarlin', quarlin', gruntin', growlin', fashious crayture! He thinks there could not be any fire, just because he was not in time to see it. Oh, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, I'm just fair ashamed o' ye."

But at this point the Laird seemed to become aware that he had given way too much to his love of pure and pithy English. He immediately said, in a more formal manner—

"I am glad to perceive, ma'am, that the meeting paid no heed to these strictures, but went on to consider whether the insurance companies should not share the expense of maintaining the fire brigade. That was most proper—most judeecious. I'm thinking that after dinner I could not do better than express my views upon that subject, in a letter addressed to the Provost. It would be in time to be read at the monthly sederunt."

"Come along, then, Mary, and let us get through our letters," said his hostess, turning away with a sigh from the dilapidated rose-garden.

As she passed the piano, she opened it.

"How strange it will sound!" she said.

She played a few bars of Mary Avon's favourite song: somehow the chords seemed singularly rich and full and beautiful after our long listening to the monotonous rush of the sea. Then she put her hand within the girl's arm and gently led her away, and said to her as they passed through the hall,

> "'Oh, little did my mither think
> When first she cradled me'

that ever I should have come back to such a picture of desolation. But we must put a brave face on it. If the autumn kills the garden, it glorifies the hills. You will want all your colour-tubes when we show you Loch Hourn."

"That was the place the Doctor was anxious to veesit," said the Laird, who was immediately behind

them. "Ay. Oh, yes, we will show Miss Mary Loch Hourn; she will get some material for sketches there, depend on't. Just the finest loch in the whole of the Highlands. When I can get Tom Galbraith first of all persuaded to see Bunessan——"

But we heard no more about Tom Galbraith. Queen Titania had uttered a slight exclamation as she glanced over the addresses of the letters directed to her.

"From Angus!" she said, as she hurriedly opened one of the envelopes, and ran her eye over the contents.

Then her face grew grave, and inadvertently she turned to the Laird.

"In three days," she said, "he was to start for Italy."

She looked at the date.

"He must have left London already!" said she, and then she examined the letter further. "And he does not say where he is going."

The Laird looked grave too—for a second. But he was an excellent actor. He began whistling the air that his hostess had been playing. He turned over his letters and papers carelessly. At length he said, with an air of fine indifference—

"The grand thing of being away at sea is to teach ye the comparateevely trifling importance of anything that can happen on land."

He tossed the unopened letters about, only regarding the addresses.

"What care I what the people may have been saying about me in my absence?—the real thing is that we got food to eat and were not swept into Corrievrechan. Come, Miss Mary, I will just ask ye to go for a stroll through the garden wi' me, until dinner-time; our good friends will not ask us to dress on an evening like this, just before we have got everything on shore. Twenty-five meenutes, ma'am? Very well. If anybody has been abusing me in my absence, we'll listen to the poor fellow after dinner, when we can get the

laugh made general, and so make some good out of him; but just now we'll have the quiet of the sunset to ourselves. Dear, dear me! we used to have the sunset after dinner when we were away up about Canna and Uist."

Mary Avon seemed to hesitate.

"What! not a single letter for ye? That shows very bad taste on the pairt of the young men about England. But I never thought much o' them. From what I hear, they are mostly given over to riding horses, and shooting pheasants, and what not. But never mind. I want ye to come out for a stroll wi' me, my lass: ye'll see some fine colour about the Morven hills presently, or I'm mistaken."

"Very well, sir," said she, obediently; and together they went out into the garden.

Now it was not until some minutes after the dinner-gong had sounded that we again saw these two, and then there was nothing in the manner of either of them to suggest to any one that anything had happened. It was not until many days afterwards that we obtained, bit by bit, an account of what had occurred, and even then it was but a stammering, and disjointed, and shy account. However, such as it was, it had better appear here, if only to keep the narrative straight.

The Laird, walking up and down the gravel path with his companion, said that he did not so much regret the disappearance of the roses, for there were plenty of other flowers to take their place. Then he thought he and she might go and sit on a seat which was placed under a drooping ash in the centre of the lawn, for from this point they commanded a fine view of the western seas and hills. They had just sat down there when he said—

"My girl, I am going to take the privilege of an old man, and speak frankly to ye. I have been watching ye, as it were—and your mind is not at ease."

Miss Avon hastily assured him that it was quite, and begged to draw his attention to the yacht in the bay, where the men were just lowering the ensign, at sunset.

The Laird returned to the subject; entreated her not to take it ill that he should interfere; and then reminded her of a certain night on Loch Leven, and of a promise he had then made her. Would he be fulfilling that solemn undertaking if he did not, at some risk of vexing her, and of being considered a prying, foolish person, endeavour to help her if she was in trouble?

Miss Avon said how grateful she was to him for all his kindness to her; and how his promise had already been amply fulfilled. She was not in trouble. She hoped no one thought that. Everything that had happened was for the best. And here—as was afterwards admitted—she burst into a fit of crying, and was very much mortified, and ashamed of herself.

But at this point the Laird would appear to have taken matters into his own hand. First of all he began to speak of his nephew—of his bright good nature, and so forth—of his professed esteem for her—of certain possibilities that he, the Laird, had been dreaming about with the fond fancy of an old man. And rather timidly he asked her—if it were true that she thought everything had happened for the best—whether, after all, his nephew Howard might not speak to her? It had been the dream of his old age to see these two together at Denny-mains, or on board that steam yacht he would buy for them on the Clyde. Was that not possible?

Here, at least, the girl was honest and earnest enough—even anxiously earnest. She assured him that that was quite impossible. It was hopeless. The Laird remained silent for some minutes, holding her hand.

"Then," said he, rather sadly, but with an affectation of grave humour, "I am going to tell you a story.

It is about a young lass, who was very proud, and who kept her thoughts very much to herself, and would not give her friends a chance of helping her. And she was very fond of a—a young Prince we will call him—who wanted to go away to the wars, and make a great name for himself. No one was prouder of the Prince than the girl, mind ye, and she encouraged him in everything, and they were great friends, and she was to give him all her diamonds, and pearls, and necklaces—she would throw them into his treasury, like a Roman matron—just that he might go away and conquer, and come back and marry her. But lo, and behold! one night all her jewels and bracelets were stolen! Then what does she do? Would ye believe it? She goes and quarrels with that young Prince, and tells him to go away and fight his battles for himself, and never to come back and see her any more—just as if any one could fight a battle wi' a sore heart. Oh, she was a wicked, wicked lass, to be so proud as that, when she had many friends that would willingly have helped her. . . . Sit down, my girl, sit down, my girl, never mind the dinner; they can wait for us. . . . Well, ye see, the story goes on that there was an old man—a foolish old man—they used to laugh at him, because of his fine fishing-tackle, and the very few fish he caught wi' the tackle—and this doited old body was always intermeddling in other people's business. And what do you think he does but go and say to the young lass: 'Ha, have I found ye out? Is it left for an old man like me—and me a bachelor too, who should know but little of the quips and cranks of a young lass's ways—is it left for an old man like me to find out that fine secret o' yours?' She could not say a word. She was dumbfounded. She had not the face to deny it: he *had* found out what that wicked girl, with all her pride, and her martyrdom, and her sprained ankles, had been about. And what do you think he did then? Why, as sure as sure can be, he

had got all the young lass's property in his pocket; and before she could say Jack Robinson, he tells her that he is going to send straight off for the Prince—this very night—a telegram to London——"

The girl had been trembling, and struggling with the hand that held hers. At last she sprang to her feet with a cry of entreaty.

"Oh, no, no, no, sir! You will not do that! You will not degrade me!"

And then—this is her own account, mind—the Laird rose too, and still held her by the hand, and spoke sternly to her.

"Degrade you?" said he. "Foolish lass! Come in to your dinner."

When these two did come in to dinner—nearly a quarter of an hour late—their hostess looked anxiously from one to the other. But what could she perceive? Mary Avon was somewhat pale, and she was silent: but that had been her way of late. As for the Laird, he came in whistling the tune of the Queen's Maries, which was a strange grace before meat, and he looked airily around him at the walls.

"I would just like to know," said he lightly, "whether there is a single house in all Scotland where ye will not find an engraving of one or other of Mr. Thomas Faed's pictures in some one of the rooms?"

And he preserved this careless and indifferent demeanour during dinner. After dinner he strolled into the library. He would venture upon a small cigar. His sole companion was the person whose humble duty in this household is to look after financial matters, so that other folks may enjoy themselves in idleness.

The Laird lay back in an easy-chair, stretched out his legs, lit his cigar, and held it at arm's length, as if it were something that ought to be looked at at a distance.

"You had something to do with the purchase of

Miss Mary's American stock, eh?" said he, pretending to be concerned about the end of the cigar.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Funded Five per Cent."

"What would be about the value of it now?"

"Just now? Oh, perhaps 106, or 107."

"No, no, no. I mean, if the bonds that that ill-faured scoondrel carried away with him were to be sold the now, what money, what English money, would they fetch?"

But this required some calculation.

"Probably about 7300*l*."

"I was asking," said the Laird, "because I was wondering whether there was any chance of tracing them."

"Not the least. They are like bank-notes—more useful, indeed, to a swindler than even bank-notes."

"Ay, is that so?" said the Laird; and he seemed to be so charmed with his whistling of the air of Queen's Maries that he returned to that performance. Oddly enough, however, he never ventured beyond the first line: perhaps he was afraid of missing the tune.

"Seven thousand, three hundred," said he, meditatively. "Man, that's a strong cigar—little, and black, and strong. Seven thousand, three hundred. Girls are strange craytures. I remember what that young Doctor was saying once about weemen being better able to bear pain than men, and not so much afraid of it either——"

And here the Queen's Maries came in again. "It would be a strange thing," said the Laird, with a sort of rueful laugh, "if I were to have a steam yacht all to myself, and cruise about in search of company, eh? No, no; that will not do. My neighbours in Strathgovan will never say that I deserted them, just when great improvements and serious work have to be

looked forward to. I will not have it said that I ran away, just to pleasure myself. Howard, my lad," he added, imaginatively addressing his absent nephew, "I doubt but ye'll have to whistle for that steam yacht."

The Laird rose.

"I think I will smoke in the garden now: it is a fine evening."

He turned at the door, and seemed suddenly to perceive a pair of stag's horns over the chimney-piece.

"That's a grand set o' horns," said he; and then he added carelessly, "What bank did ye say they American bonds were in?"

"The London and Westminster."

"They're just a noble pair o' horns," said he emphatically. "I wonder ye do not take them with ye to London." And then he left.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A RELEASE.

We had a long spell ashore at this time, for we were meditating a protracted voyage, and everything had to be left ship-shape behind us. The Laird was busy from morning till night; but it would appear that all his attention was not wholly given to the affairs of Strathgovan. Occasionally he surprised his hostess by questions which had not the least reference to asphalte pavements or gymnasium chains. He kept his own counsel, nevertheless.

By and by his mysterious silence so piqued and provoked her that she seized a favourable opportunity for asking him, point-blank, whether he had not spoken to Mary Avon. They were in the garden at the time,

he seated on an iron seat, with a bundle of papers beside him; she standing on the gravel-path with some freshly-cut flowers in her hand. There was a little colour in her face, for she feared that the question might be deemed impertinent; yet, after all, it was no idle curiosity that prompted her to ask it. Was she not as much interest in the girl's happiness as any one could be?

"I have," said he, looking up at her calmly.

Well, she knew that. Was this all the answer she was to get?

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said he, after a second, "if I seem to be making a mystery where there is no mystery. I hate all foolishness like that. I do not myself believe there is anything of the kind; but I will just ask ye to wait for a day or two before speaking to the lass herself. After that, I will leave it all in your hands. I trust ye will consider that I have done my part."

"Oh, I am sure of that, sir," said she: though how could she be sure?

"There is not much I would not do for that lass," said he, somewhat absently. "She has a wonderful way of getting a grip of one's heart, as it were. And if I could have wished that things had turned out otherwise——"

The Laird did not finish the sentence. He seemed to rouse himself.

"Toots! toots!" said he, frowning. "When we are become men, we have to put away childish things. What is the use of crying for the moon? There, ma'am, is something serious and practical to consider —something better worth considering than childish dreams and fancies."

And then, with much lucidity and with a most dispassionate parade of arguments on both sides, he put before her this knotty question: whether it was a fit and proper thing for a body like the Strathgovan

Commissioners to own public-house property? That was the general question. The immediate question was whether the "William Wallace" public-house, situated in the Netherbiggins road, should be re-let or summarily closed? On the one hand it was contended that the closing of the "William Wallace" would only produce a greater run on the other licensed houses; on the other hand, it was urged that a body like the Commissioners should set an example and refuse to encourage a mischievous traffic. Now the Laird's own view of the liquor question—which he always put forward modestly, as subject to the opinion of those who had had a wider legislative and administrative experience than himself—was, that the total suppression of the liquor traffic was a chimera; and that a practical man should turn to see what could be done in the way of stringent police regulations. He was proceeding to expound these points when he suddenly caught sight of the Youth, who had appeared at the gate, with two long fishing-rods over his shoulder. He dropped his voice.

"That just reminds me, ma'am," said he. "I am greatly obliged to ye—my nephew equally so—for your great kindness to him. I think it will not be necessary for him to trespass on your forbearance any longer."

"I don't quite understand you."

"I think I will let him go back to his own pursuits now," said the Laird.

"Oh, no," she said. "By all means let him come with us to Stornoway. He has been very good in not grumbling over any inconvenience. You would not send him away just as we are going to start on our longest cruise?"

She could not say anything further at the moment, for the Youth came up the gravel-path, and threw the two huge rods on to the lawn.

"Look there, uncle!" he cried. "I don't care

what size of lithe you get on the line, I'll bet those rods won't break, any way. Sutherland used to be lamenting over the big fish you lost up in the north: try them with those things!"

Here their hostess passed on and into the house with her flowers. Uncle and nephew were left by themselves.

"Howard, lad," said the elder of the two men, "bring that chair over, and sit opposite me. I do not want my papers to be disturbed. There are one or two matters of business I would like to put before ye."

The Youth did as he was bid. The Laird paused for a second or two; then he began—

"When I asked ye to come to the Highlands," said he, slowly, I put an alternative before ye, with certain consequences. There were two things, one of which I wanted ye to do. Ye have done neither."

Howard Smith looked somewhat alarmed: his hostess was not there to put a jocular air over that bargain.

"Well, sir," he stammered, "I—I could not do what was impossible. I—I have done my best."

"Nevertheless," said the Laird, in a matter-of-fact way, "neither has been done. I will not say it has been altogether your fault. So far as I have seen, ye have been on very good terms with the young leddy; and—and—yes, paid her what attention was expected of ye; and——"

"Well, you see, uncle," he interposed, eagerly, "what was the use of my proposing to the girl only to be snubbed? Don't I know she cares no more about me than about the man in the moon? Why, anybody could see that. Of course, you know, if you insist on it—if you drive me to it—if you want me to go in and get snubbed—I'll do it. I'll take my chance. But I don't think it's fair. I mean," he added hastily, "I don't think it is necessary."

"I do not wish to drive ye to anything," said the Laird—on any other occasion he might have laughed at the Youth's ingenuousness, but now he had serious business on hand. "I am content to take things as they are. Neither of the objects I had in view has been accomplished; perhaps both were impossible; who can tell what lies in store for any of us, when we begin to plan and scheme? However, I am not disposed to regard it as your fault. I will impose no fine or punishment, as if we were playing at theatre-acting. I have neither kith nor kin of my own; and it is my wish that, at my death, Denny-mains should go to you——"

The Youth's face turned red; yet he did not know how to express his gratitude. It did not quite seem a time for sentiment; the Laird was talking in such a matter-of-fact way.

"—Subject to certain conditions," he continued. "First of all, I spoke some time ago of spending a sum of 3000*l.* on a steam yacht. Dismiss that from your mind. I cannot afford it; neither will you be able."

The young man stared at this. For although he cared very little about the steam yacht—having a less liking for the sea than some of us—he was surprised to hear that a sum like 3000*l.* was even a matter for consideration to a reputedly rich man like his uncle.

"Oh, certainly, sir," said he. "I don't at all want a steam yacht."

"Very well, we will now proceed."

The Laird took up one of the documents beside him, and began to draw certain lines on the back of it.

"Ye will remember," said he, pointing with his pencil, "that where the estate proper of Denny-mains runs out to the Coulter-burn Road, there is a piece of land belonging to me, on which are two tenements, yielding together, I should say, about 300*l.* a year. By and by, if a road should be cut so—across to the

Netherbiggins road—that land will be more valuable: many a one will be wanting to feu that piece then, mark my words. However, let that stand by. In the mean time I have occasion for a sum of ten thousand three hundred pounds—"

The Youth looked still more alarmed: had his uncle been speculating?

"—and I have considered it my duty to ask you, as the future proprietor of Denny-mains in all human probability, whether ye would rather have these two tenements sold, with as much of the adjoining land as would make up that sum, or whether ye would have the sum made a charge on the estate generally, and take your chance of that land rising in value? What say ye?"

The Laird had been prepared for all this; but the Youth was not. He looked rather frightened.

"I should be sorry to hear, sir," he stammered, "that—that—you were pressed for money——"

"Pressed for money!" said the Laird severely; "I am not pressed for money. There is not a square yard of Denny-mains with a farthing of mortgage on it. Come, let's hear what ye have to say."

"Then," said the young man, collecting his wits, "my opinion is, that a man should do what he likes with his own."

"That's well said," returned the Laird, much mollified. "And I'm no sure but that if we were to roup[1] that land, that quarrelsome body Johnny Guthrie might not be trying to buy it; and I would not have him for a neighbour on any consideration. Well, I will write to Todd and Buchanan about it at once."

The Laird rose and began to bundle his papers together. The Youth laid hold of the fishing-rods, and was about to carry them off somewhere, when he was suddenly called back.

"Dear me!" said the Laird, "my memory's going.

[1] To *roup*, to sell by public auction.

There was another thing I was about to put before ye, lad. Our good friends here have been very kind in asking ye to remain so long. I'm thinking ye might offer to give up your state-room before they start on this long trip. Is there any business or occupation ye would like to be after in the south?"

The flash of light that leapt to the young man's face!

"Why, uncle!" he exclaimed eagerly, diving his hand into his pocket, "I have twice been asked by old Barnes to go to his place—the best partridge shoooting in Bedfordshire——"

But the Youth recollected himself.

"I mean," said he seriously, "Barnes, the swell solicitor, don't you know—Hughes, Barnes, and Barnes. It would be an uncommonly good thing for me to stand well with them. They are just the making of a young fellow at the bar when they take him up. Old Barnes's son was at Cambridge with me; but he doesn't do anything—an idle fellow—cares for nothing but shooting and billiards. I really ought to cultivate old Barnes."

The Laird eyed him askance.

"Off ye go to your pairtridge-shooting, and make no more pretence," said he; and then he added, "And look here, my lad, when ye leave this house I hope ye will express in a proper form your thanks for the kindness ye have received. No, no; I do not like the way of you English in that respect. Ye take no notice of anything. Ye receive a man's hospitality for a week, a fortnight, a month; and then ye shake hands with him at the door; and walk out—as if nothing had happened! These may be good manners in England; they are not here."

"I can't make a speech, uncle," said the Youth slyly. "They don't teach us those things at the English public schools."

"Ye gowk," said the Laird severely, "do ye think

I want ye to make a speech like Norval on the Grampian Hills? I want ye to express in proper language your thankfulness for the attention and kindness that have been bestowed on ye. What are ye afraid of? Have ye not got a mouth? From all that I can hear the English have a wonderful fluency of speech, when there is no occasion for it at all: bletherin' away like twenty steam-engines, and not a grain of wheat to be found when a' the stour is laid."

CHAPTER XL.

"WHILE THE RIPPLES FOLD UPON SANDS OF GOLD."

THE days passed, and still the Laird professed to be profoundly busy; and our departure for the north was further and further postponed. The Youth had at first expressed his intention of waiting to see us off; which was very kind on his part, considering how anxious he was to cultivate the acquaintance of that important solicitor. His patience, however, at last gave out; and he begged to be allowed to start on a certain morning. The evening before we walked down to the shore with him, and got pulled out to the yacht, and sate on deck while he went below to pack such things as had been left in his state-room.

"It will be a strange thing," said our gentle Admiral-in-chief, "for us to have a cabin empty. That has never happened to us in the Highlands, all the time we have been here. It will be a sort of ghost's room; we shall not dare to look into it for fear of seeing something to awaken old memories."

She put her hand in her pocket, and drew out some small object.

"Look," said she, quite sentimentally.

It was only a bit of pencil: if it had been the skull of Socrates she could not have regarded it with a greater interest.

"It is the pencil Angus used to mark our games with. I found it in the saloon the day before yesterday;" and then she added, almost to herself, "I wonder where he is now."

The answer to this question startled us.

"In Paris," said the Laird.

But no sooner had he uttered the words than he seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"That is, I believe so," he said hastily. "I am not in correspondence with him. I do not know for certain. I have heard—it has been stated to me—that he might perhaps remain until the end of this week in Paris before going on to Naples."

He appeared rather anxious to avoid being further questioned. He began to discourse upon certain poems of Burns, whom he had once or twice somewhat slightingly treated. He was now bent on making ample amends. In especial, he asked whether his hostess did not remember the beautiful verse in "Mary Morison," which describes the lover looking on at the dancing of a number of young people, and conscious only that his own sweetheart is not there?

"Do ye remember it, ma'am?" said he; and he proceeded to repeat it for her—

'Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.

'Though this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed and said amang them a',
"Ye are na Mary Morison."'

—Beautiful, beautiful, is it not? And that is an extraordinary business—and as old as the hills too—

of one young person waling [1] out another as the object of all the hopes of his or her life; and nothing will do but that one. Ye may show them people who are better to look at, richer, cleverer; ye may reason and argue; ye may make plans, and what not; it is all of no use. And people who have grown up, and who forgot what they themselves were at twenty or twenty-five, may say what they like about the foolishness of a piece of sentiment; and they may prove to the young folks that this madness will not last, and that they should marry for more substantial reasons; but ye are jist talking to the wind! Madness or not madness, it is human nature; and ye might jist as well try to fight against the tides. I will say this, too," continued the Laird, and as he warmed to his subject, he rose, and began to pace up and down the deck, "if a young man were to come and tell me that he was ready to throw up a love-match for the sake of prudence and worldly advantage, I would say to him: 'Man, ye are a poor crayture. Ye have not got the backbone of a mouse in ye.' I have no respect for a young man who has prudence beyond his years; not one bit. If it is human nature for a man of fifty years to laugh at sentiment and romance, it is human nature for a man at twenty-five to believe in it; and he who does not believe in it then, I say is a poor crayture. He will never come to anything. He may make money; but he will be a poor stupid ass all his days just without those experiences that make life a beautiful thing to look back on."

He came and sate down by Mary Avon.

"Perhaps a sad thing, too," said he, as he took her hand in his; "but even that is better than a dull causeway, with an animal trudging along and sorely burdened with the world's wealth. And now, my lass, have ye got everything tight and trim for the grand voyage?"

[1] *Waling*—choosing.

"She has been at it again, sir," says his hostess, interposing. "She wants to set out for the south to-morrow morning."

"It would be a convenient chance for me," said the girl simply. "Mr. Smith might be good enough to see me as far as Greenock—though, indeed, I don't at all mind travelling by myself. I must stop at Kendal—is that where the junction is?—for I promised the poor old woman who died in Edinburgh that I would call and see some relations of hers who live near Windermere."

"They can wait, surely?" said the Laird, with frowning eyebrows, as if the poor people at Windermere had attempted to do him some deadly injury.

"Oh, there is no hurry for them," said she. "They do not even know I am coming. But this chance of Mr. Smith going by the steamer to-morrow would be convenient."

"Put that fancy out of your head," said he with decision. "Ye are going to no Greenock, and to no Kendal, at the present time. Ye are going away with us to the north, to see such things as ye never saw before in your life. And if ye are anxious to get on with your work, I'll tell ye what I'll do. There's our Provost M'Kendrick has been many a time telling me of the fine salmon-fishing he got at the west side of Lewis—I think he said at a place called Gometra——"

"Grimersta," is here suggested.

"The very place. Ye shall paint a picture of Grimersta, my lass, on commission for the Provost. I authorise ye: if he will not take it, I will take it myself. Never mind what the place is like—the Provost has no more imagination than a boiled lobster; but he knows when he has good friends, and good fishing, and a good glass of whisky; and depend on it, he'll be proud to have a picture of the place, on your own terms. I tell ye I authorise ye."

Here the Youth came on deck, saying he was now ready to go ashore.

"Do you know, sir," said his hostess, rising, "what Mary has been trying to get me to believe?—that she is afraid of the equinoctials!"

The Laird laughed aloud.

"That *is* a good one—that *is* a good one!" he cried. "I never heard a better story about Homesh."

"I know the gales are very wild here when they begin," said Miss Avon seriously. "Every one says so."

But the Laird only laughs the more, and is still chuckling to himself as he gets down into the gig: the notion of Mary Avon being afraid of anything—of fifteen dozen of equinoctial gales, for example—was to him simply ludicrous.

But a marked and unusual change came over the Laird's manner when we got back to Castle Osprey. During all the time he had been with us, although he had had occasionally to administer rebukes, with more or less of solemnity, he had never once lost his temper. We should have imagined it impossible for anything to have disturbed his serene dignity of demeanour. But now—when he discovered that there was no letter awaiting any one of us—his impatience seemed dangerously akin to vexation and anger. He would have the servants summoned and cross-examined. Then he would not believe them; but must needs search the various rooms for himself. The afternoon post had really brought nothing but a newspaper—addressed to the Laird—and that he testily threw into the waste-paper basket, without opening it. We had never seen him give way like this before.

At dinner, too, his temper was no better. He began to deride the business habits of the English people—which was barely civil. He said that the English feared the Scotch and the Germans just as the Americans feared the Chinese—because the latter were the more indefatigable workers. He declared that if the London men had less Amontillado sherry and cigarettes in

their private office-rooms, their business would be conducted with much greater accuracy and dispatch. Then another thought struck him: were the servants prepared to swear that no registered letter had been presented in the afternoon, and taken away again because there was no one in the house to sign the receipt? Inquiry being made, it was found that no such letter had been presented. But finally, when the turmoil about this wretched thing was at its height, the Laird was pressed to say from which part of the country the missive was expected. From London, he said. It was then pointed out to him that the London letters were usually sent along in the evening—sometimes as late as eight or nine o'clock. He went on with his dinner, grumbling.

Sure enough, before he had finished dinner, a footstep was heard on the gravel outside. The Laird, without any apology, jumped up and went to the window.

"There's the postman," said he, as he resumed his seat. "Ye might give him a shilling, ma'am: it is a long climb up the hill."

It was the postman, no doubt; and he had brought a letter, but it was not for the Laird. We were all apprehensive of a violent storm when the servant passed on and handed this letter to Mary Avon. But the Laird said nothing. Miss Avon, like a properly-conducted school-girl, put the letter in her pocket.

There was no storm. On the contrary, the Laird got quite cheerful. When his hostess hoped that no serious inconvenience would result from the non-arrival of the letter, he said, "Not the least!" He began and told us the story of the old lady who endeavoured to engage the practical Homesh—while he was collecting tickets—in a disquisition on the beauties of Highland scenery, and who was abruptly bidden to "mind her own pussness"; we had heard the story not more than thirty-eight times, perhaps, from various natives of Scotland.

But the letter about which the Laird had been anxious had—as some of us suspected—actually arrived, and was then in Mary Avon's pocket. After dinner the two women went into the drawing-room. Miss Avon sate down to the piano, and began to play, idly enough, the air called *Heimweh*. Of what home was she thinking then—this waif and stray among the winds of the world?

Tea was brought in. At last the curiosity of the elder woman could no longer be restrained.

"Mary," said she, "are you not going to read that letter?"

"Dear me!" said the girl, plunging into her pocket, "I had forgotten I had a letter to read."

She took it out and opened it, and began to read. Her face looked puzzled at first, then alarmed. She turned to her friend.

"What is it? What can it mean?" she said, in blank dismay; and the trembling fingers handed her the letter.

Her friend had less difficulty in understanding; although, to be sure, before she had finished this perfectly plain and matter-of-fact communication, there were tears in her eyes. It was merely a letter from the manager of a bank in London, begging to inform Miss Avon that he had just received, through Messrs. Todd and Buchanan, of Glasgow, a sum of 10,300*l.* to be placed to her credit. He was also desired to say, that this sum was entirely at her own free disposal; but the donor would prefer—if she had no objection—that it should be invested in some home security, either in a good mortgage, or in the Metropolitan Board of Works Stock. It was a plain and simple letter.

"Oh, Mary, don't you understand—don't you understand?" said she. "He meant to have given you a steam yacht, if—if you married Howard Smith. He has given you all the money you lost; and the steam

yacht too. And there is not a word of regret about all his plans and schemes being destroyed. And this is the man we have all been making fun of."

In her conscious self-abasement she did not perceive how bewildered—how absolutely frightened—this girl was. Mary Avon took back the letter mechanically; she stood silent for a second or two; then she said, almost in a whisper—

"Giving me all that money! Oh, I cannot take it—I cannot take it! I should not have stayed here—I should not have told him anything—I—I—wish to go away——"

But the common sense of the elder woman came to her rescue. She took the girl's hand firmly, and said—

"You shall not go away. And when it is your good fortune to meet with such a friend as that, you shall not wound him and insult him by refusing what he has given to you. No; but you will go at once and thank him."

"I cannot—I cannot," she said, with both her hands trembling. "What shall I say? How can I thank him? If he were my own father or brother, how could I thank him?——"

Her friend left the room for a second, and returned.

"He is in the library alone," said she. "Go to him. And do not be so ungrateful as to even speak of refusing."

The girl had no time to compose any speech. She walked to the library door, timidly tapped at it, and entered. The Laird was seated in an easy-chair, reading.

When he saw her come in—he had been expecting a servant with coffee, probably—he instantly put aside his book.

"Well, Miss Mary?" said he cheerfully.

She hesitated. She could not speak; her throat was choking. And then, scarcely knowing what she did, she sank down before him, and put her head and

her hands on his knees, and burst out crying and sobbing. And all that he could hear of any speech-making, or of any gratitude, or thanks, was only two words—

"*My father!*"

He put his hand gently on the soft black hair.

"Child," said he, "it is nothing. I have kept my word."

CHAPTER XLI.

BACKWARD THOUGHTS.

THAT was a beautiful morning on which we got up at an unearthly hour to see the Youth depart—all of us, that is to say, except Mary Avon. And yet she was not usually late. The Laird could not understand it. He kept walking from one room to another, or hovering about the hall; and when the breakfast-gong sounded, he refused to come in and take his place without his accustomed companion. But just at this moment whom should he behold entering by the open door but Mary Avon herself—laden with her artistic impedimenta? He pounced on her at once, and seized the canvas.

"Bless me, lassie, what have ye been about? Have ye done all this this morning? Ye must have got up in the middle of the night!"

It was but a rough sketch, after all—or the beginings of a sketch, rather—of the wide, beautiful sea and mountain view from the garden of Castle Osprey.

"I thought, sir," said she, in a somewhat hesitating way, "that you might perhaps be so kind as to accept from me those sketches I have made on board the *White Dove*—and—and if they were at Denny-mains, I should like to have the series complete—and—and

it would naturally begin with a sketch from the garden here——"

He looked at her for a moment, with a grave, perhaps wistful, kindness in his face.

"My lass, I would rather have seen you at Denny-mains."

That was the very last word he ever uttered concerning the dream that had just been destroyed. And it was only about this time, I think, that we began to recognise the simple, large, noble nature of this man. We had been too much inclined to regard the mere husks and externals of his character—to laugh at his assumption of parochial importance, his solemn discussions of the Semple case, his idiotic stories about Homesh. And it was not a mere freak of generosity that revealed to us something of the finer nature of this old Scotchman. People as rich as he have often paid bigger sums than 10,300*l.* for the furtherance of a hobby. But it was to put away his hobby—it was to destroy for ever the "dream of his old age"—that he had been thus munificent towards this girl. And there was no complaint or regret. He had told us it was time for him to put away childish things. And this was the last word said—"My lass, I would rather have seen you at Denny-mains."

The Laird was exceedingly facetious at this breakfast-party, and his nephew had a bad time of it. There were mysterious questions about Messrs. Hughes, Barnes, and Barnes: as to whether consultations were best held in stubble or in turnips; or whether No. 5 shot was the best for bringing down briefs; and so forth.

"Never mind, uncle," said the Youth goodnaturedly. "I will send you some partridges for the larder of the yacht."

"You need not do anything of the kind," said the Laird; "before you are in Bedfordshire the *White Dove* will be many a mile away from the course of luggage steamers."

"Oh, are you ready to start, then, sir?" said his hostess.

"This very meenute, if it pleases you," said he.

She looked rather alarmed, but said nothing. In the mean time the waggonette had come to the door.

By and by there was a small party assembled on the steps to see the Youth drive off. And now the time had come for him to make that speech of thanks which his uncle had pointed out was distinctly due from him. The Laird, indeed, regarded his departure with a critical air; and no doubt waited to see how his nephew would acquit himself.

Perhaps the Youth had forgotten. At all events, having bidden good-bye to the others, he shook hands last of all with his hostess, and said lightly—

"Thank you very much. I have enjoyed the whole thing tremendously."

Then he jumped into the waggonette, and took off his cap as a parting salute; and away he went. The Laird frowned. When he was a young man that was not the way in which hospitality was acknowledged.

Then Mary Avon turned from regarding the departing waggonette.

"Are we to get ready to start?" said she.

"What do you say, sir?" asked the hostess of the Laird.

"I am at your service," he replies.

And so it appeared to be arranged. But still Queen Titania looked irresolute and uneasy. She did not at once set the whole house in an uproar; or send down for the men; or begin herself to harry the garden. She kept loitering about the door; pretending to look at the signs of the weather. At last Mary said—

"Well, in any case, you will be more than an hour in having the things carried down; so I will do a little bit more to that sketch in the mean time."

The moment she was gone, her hostess says in a hurried whisper to the Laird—

"Will you come into the library, sir, for a moment?"

He obediently followed her; and she shut the door.

"Are we to start without Angus Sutherland?" she asked, without circumlocution.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said the wily Laird.

Then she was forced to explain, which she did in a somewhat nervous manner.

"Mary has told me, sir, of your very, very great generosity to her. I hope you will let me thank you too."

"There is not another word to be said about it," he said simply. "I found a small matter wrong in the world that I thought I could put right; and I did it; and now we start fresh and straight again. That is all."

"But about Angus Sutherland," said she still more timidly. "You were quite right in your conjectures—at least I imagine so—indeed, I am sure of it. And now, don't you think we should send for him?"

"The other day, ma'am," said he slowly, "I informed ye that when I considered my part done I would leave the matter in your hands entirely. I had to ask some questions of the lass, no doubt, to make sure of my ground; though I felt it was not a business fit for an old bachelor like me to intermeddle wi'. I am now of opinion that it would be better, as I say, to leave the matter in your hands entirely."

The woman looked rather bewildered.

"But what am I to do?" said she. "Mary will never allow me to send for him—and I have not his address in any case——"

The Laird took a telegram from his breast-pocket.

"There it is," said he, "until the end of this week, at all events."

She looked at it hesitatingly; it was from the office of the magazine that Angus Sutherland edited; and was in reply to a question of the Laird's. Then she lifted her eyes.

"Do you think I might ask Mary herself?"

"That is for a woman to decide," said he; and again she was thrown back on her own resources.

Well, this midge of a woman has some courage too. She began to reflect on what the Laird had adventured, and done, for the sake of this girl; and was she not prepared to risk something also? After all, if these two had been fostering a vain delusion, it would be better to have it destroyed at once.

And so she went out into the garden, where she found Miss Avon again seated at her easel. She went gently over to her; she had the telegram in her hand. For a second or two she stood irresolute; then she boldly walked across the lawn, and put her hand on the girl's shoulder. With the other hand she held the telegram before Mary Avon's eyes.

"Mary," said she, in a very low and gentle voice, "will you write to him now and ask him to come back?"

The girl dropped the brush she had been holding on to the grass, and her face got very pale.

"Oh, how could I do that?" said she, in an equally low—and frightened—voice.

"You sent him away."

There was no answer. The elder woman waited; she only saw that Mary Avon's fingers were working nervously with the edge of the palette.

"Mary," said she at length, "am I right in imagining the cause of your sending him away? May I write and explain, if you will not?"

"Oh, how can you explain?" the girl said, almost piteously. "It is better as it is. Did you not hear what the kindest friend I ever found in the world had to say of me yesterday, about young people who were too prudent, and were mercenary; and how he had no respect for young people who thought too much about money——"

"Mary, Mary!" the other said, "he was not speak-

ing about you. You mercenary! He was speaking about a young man who would throw over his sweetheart for the sake of money. You mercenary! Well, let me appeal to Angus! When I explain to him, and ask him what he thinks of you, I will abide by his answer."

"Well, I did not think of myself; it was for his sake I did it," said the girl, in a somewhat broken voice; and tears began to steal down her cheeks, and she held her head away.

"Well then, I won't bother you any more, Mary," said the other, in her kindliest way. "I won't ask you to do anything, except to get ready to get down to the yacht."

"At once?" said the girl, instantly getting up, and drying her eyes. She seemed greatly relieved by this intimation of an immediate start.

"As soon as the men have the luggage taken down."

"Oh, that will be very pleasant," said she, immediately beginning to put away her colours. "What a fine breeze! I am sure I shall be ready in fifteen minutes."

Then the usual bustle began; messages flying up and down, and the gig and dingay racing each other to the shore and back again. By twelve o'clock everything had been got on board. Then the *White Dove* gently glided away from her moorings; we had started on our last and longest voyage.

It seemed innumerable ages since we had been in our sea-home. And that first glance round the saloon —as our absent friend the Doctor had remarked— called up a multitude of recollections, mostly converging to a general sense of snugness, and remoteness, and good fellowship. The Laird sank down into a corner of one of the couches, and said—

"Well, I think I could spend the rest of my days in this yacht. It seems as if I had lived in it for many, many years."

But Miss Avon would not let him remain below; it

was a fine sailing day; and very soon we were all on deck. A familiar scene?—this expanse of blue sea, curling with white here and there; with a dark blue sky overhead, and all around the grand panorama of mountains in their rich September hues? The sea is never familiar. In its constant and moving change, its secret and slumbering power, its connection with the great unknown beyond the visible horizon, you never become familiar with the sea. We may recognise the well-known landmarks as we steal away to the north—the long promontory and white lighthouse of Lismore, the ruins of Duart, the woods of Scallasdale, the glimpse into Loch Aline—and we may use these things only to calculate our progress; but always around us is the strange life, and motion, and infinitude of the sea, which never becomes familiar.

We had started with a light favourable wind, of the sort that we had come to call a Mary-Avon-steering breeze; but after luncheon this died away, and we lay idly for a long time opposite the dark green woods of Fuinary. However, there was a wan and spectral look about the sunshine of this afternoon, and there were some long, ragged shreds of cloud in the southern heavens—just over the huge round shoulders of the Mull mountains—that told us we were not likely to be harassed by any protracted calms. And, in fact, occasional puffs and squalls came over from the south which, if they did not send us on much farther, at least kept everybody on the alert.

And at length we got it. The gloom over the mountains had deepened, and the streaks of sunlit sky that were visible here and there had a curious coppery tinge about them. Then we heard a hissing in towards the shore, and the darkening band on the sea spread rapidly out to us; then there was a violent shaking of blocks and spars, and, as the *White Dove* bent to the squall, a most frightful clatter was heard below, showing that some careless people had been about. Then

away went the yacht like an arrow! We cared little for the gusts of rain that came whipping across from time to time. We would not even go down to see what damage had been done in the cabins. John of Skye, with his savage hatred of the long calms we had endured, refused to lower his gaff topsail. At last he was "letting her have it."

We spun along, with the water hissing away from our wake; but the squall had not had time to raise anything of a sea, so there was but little need for the women to duck their heads to the spray. Promontory after promontory, bay after bay was passed, until far ahead of us, through the driving mists of rain, we could make out the white shaft of Ru-na-Gaul lighthouse. But here another condition of affairs confronted us. When we turned her nose to the south, to beat in to Tobermory harbour, the squall was coming tearing out of that cup among the hills with an exceeding violence. When the spray sprang high at the bows, the flying shreds of it that reached us bore an uncommon resemblance to the thong of a whip. The topsail was got down, the mizen taken in, and then we proceeded to fight our way into the harbour in a series of tacks that seemed to last only a quarter of a second. What with the howling of the wind, that blew back his orders in his face; and what with the wet decks, that caused the men to stumble now and again; and what with the number of vessels in the bay, that cut short his tacks at every turn, Captain John of Skye had an exciting time of it. But we knew him of old. He "put on" an extra tack, when there was no need for it, and slipped through between a fishing-smack and a large schooner, merely for the sake of "showing off." And then the *White Dove* was allowed to go up to the wind, and slowly slackened her pace, and the anchor went out with a roar. We were probably within a yard of the precise spot where we had last anchored in the Tobermory bay.

It blew and rained hard all that evening, and we did not even think of going on deck after dinner. We were quite content as we were. Somehow a new and secret spirit of cheerfulness had got possession of certain members of this party, without any ostensible cause. There was no longer the depression that had prevailed about West Loch Tarbert. When Mary Avon played bézique with the Laird, it was to a scarcely audible accompaniment of "The Queen's Maries."

Nor did the evening pass without an incident worthy of some brief mention. There is, in the *White Dove*, a state-room which really acts as a passage, during the day, between the saloon and the forecastle; and when this state-room is not in use, Master Fred is in the habit of converting it into a sort of pantry, seeing that it adjoins his galley. Now on this evening, when our shifty Friedrich d'or came in with soda-water and such like things, he took occasion to say to the Rear-Admiral of the Fleet on board—

"I beg your pardon, mem, but there is no one now in this state-room, and will I use it for a pantry?"

"You will do nothing of the kind, Fred," said she quite sharply.

CHAPTER XLII.

A TOAST.

"I AM almost afraid of what I have done; but it is past recall now:" this is the mysterious sentence one hears on climbing up the companion next morning. It is Queen Titania and the Laird who are talking; but as soon as a third person appears they become consciously and guiltily silent. What does it matter? We have other work on hand than prying into two-penny-halfpenny secrets.

For we have resolved on starting away for the north in spite of this fractious weather. A more unpromising-looking morning indeed for setting out could not well be imagined—windy, and wet, and squally; the driven green sea outside springing white where it meets the line of the coast; Loch Sunart and its mountains hidden away altogether behind the mists of rain; wan flashes of sunlight here and there only serving to show how swiftly the clouds are flying. But the *White Dove* has been drying her wings all the summer; she can afford to face a shower now. And while the men are hoisting the sail and getting the anchor hove short, our two women-folk array themselves in tightly-shaped ulsters, with hoods drawn over their heads; and the Laird appears in a waterproof reaching to his heels; and even the skylights have their tarpaulins thrown over. Dirty weather or no, we mean to start.

There are two or three yachts in the bay, the last of the summer-fleet all hastening away to the south. There is no movement on the deck of any one of them. Here and there, however, in sheltered places—under a bit of awning, or standing by the doors of deck-saloons—we can make out huddled groups of people, who are regarding, with a pardonable curiosity, the operations of John of Skye and his merry men.

"They take us for maniacs," says Queen Titania from out of her hood, "to be setting out for the north in such weather."

And we were nearly affording those amiable spectators a pretty sight. The wind coming in variable gusts, the sails failed to fill at the proper moment, and the *White Dove* drifted right on to the bows of a great schooner, whose bowsprit loomed portentous overhead. There was a wild stampede for boat-hooks and oars; and then with arms, and feet, and poles—aided by the swarming crew of the schooner—we managed to clear her with nothing more serious than an ominous grating along the gig. And then the

wind catching her, she gradually came under the control of Captain John; and away we went for the north, beating right in the teeth of the gusts that came tearing over from the mouth of Loch Sunart.

"It's a bad wind, mem, for getting up to Isle Ornsay," says John of Skye to the Admiral. "Ay, and the sea pretty coorse, too, when we get outside Ardnamurchan."

"Now, listen to me, John," she says severely, and with an air of authority—as much authoirty, that is to say, as can be assumed by a midge enclosed in an ulster. "I am not going to have any of that. I know you of old. As soon as you get out of Tobermory, you immediately discover that the wind is against our going north; and we turn round and run away down to Iona and the Bull-hole. I will not go to the Bull-hole. If I have to sail this yacht myself, night and day, I will go to Isle Ornsay."

"If ye please, mem," says John of Skye, grinning with great delight over her facetiousness. "Oh, I will tek the yat to Isle Ornsay very well, if the leddies not afraid of a little coorse sea. And you will not need to sail the yat at all, mem. But I not afraid to let you sail the yat. You will know about the sailing now shist as much as Mr. Sutherland."

At the mention of this name, Queen Titania glanced at Mary Avon, perceived she was not listening, and went nearer to John of Skye, and said something to him in a lower voice. There was a quick look of surprise and pleasure on the handsome, brown-bearded face.

"Oh, I ferry glad of that, mem," said he.

"Hush, John! Not a word to anybody," said she.

By this time we had beat out of the harbour, and were now getting longer tacks; so that, when the sheets were properly coiled, it was possible for the Laird and Miss Avon to attempt a series of short promenades on the wet decks. It was an uncertain and unstable

performance, to be sure; for the sea was tumultuous; but it served.

"Mutual help—that's the thing," said the Laird to his companion, as together they staggered along, or stood steady to confront a particularly fierce gust of wind. "We are independent of the world—this solitary vessel out in the waste of waters—but we are not independent of each other. It just reminds me of the small burghs outside Glasgow; we wish to be independent of the great ceety lying near us; we prefer to have a separate existence; but we can help each other for all that in a most unmistakeable way——"

Here the Laird was interrupted by the calling out of Captain John—"*Ready about!*"—and he and his companion had to get out of the way of the boom. Then they resumed their promenade, and he his discourse.

"Do ye think, for example," said this profound philosopher, "that any one burgh would have been competent to decide on a large question like the clauses of the Police Act that refer to cleansing and lighting?"

"I am not sure," Miss Avon admitted.

"No, no," said he confidently, "large questions should be considered in common council—with every opportunity of free discussion. I do not much like to speak about local matters, or of my own share in them, but I must take credit for this, that it was myself recommended to the commissioners to summon a public meeting. It was so, and the meeting was quite unanimous. It was Provost McKendrick, ye must understand, who formally made the proposal that the consideration of those clauses should be remitted to the clerks of the various burghs, who were to report; but the suggestion was really mine—I make no scruple in claiming it. And then, see the result! When the six clerks were agreed, and sent in their report, look at the authority of such a document! Who but an ass would make freevolous objections?"

The Laird laughed aloud.

"It was that crayture, Johnny Guthrie," said he, "as usual! I am not sure that I have mentioned his name to ye before?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, sir," remarked Miss Avon.

"It was that crayture, Johnny Guthrie—in the face of the unanimous report of the whole six clerks! Why, what could be more reasonable than that the lighting of closes and common stairs should fall on the landlords, but with power to recover from the tenants; while the cleansing of back-courts—being a larger and more general measure—should be the work of the commissioners and chargeable in the police rates? It is a great sanitary work that benefits every one; why should not all have a hand in paying for it?"

Miss Avon was understood to assent; but the fact was that the small portion of her face left uncovered by her hood had just then received an unexpected bath of salt water; and she had to halt for a moment to get out a handkerchief from some sub-ulsterian recess.

"Well," continued the Laird, as they resumed their walk, "what does this body Guthrie do but rise and propose that the landlords—mind ye, the landlords alone—should be rated for the expense of cleaning the back-courts! I declare there are some folk seem to think that a landlord is made of nothing but money, and that it is everybody's business to harry him, and worry him, and screw every farthing out of him. If Johnny Guthrie had half a dozen lands of houses himself, what would he say about the back-courts then?"

This triumphant question settled the matter; and we haled the Laird below for luncheon. Our last glance round showed us the Atlantic of a silvery grey, and looking particularly squally; with here and there a gleam of pale sunshine falling on the long headland of Ardnamurchan.

There was evidently some profound secret about.

"Well, ma'am, and where will we get to the night, do ye think?" said the Laird, cheerfully, as he proceeded to carve a cold fowl.

"It is of no consequence," said the other, with equal carelessness. "You know we must idle away a few days somewhere."

Idle away a few days?—and this *White Dove* bent on a voyage to the far north when the very last of the yachts were fleeing south!

"I mean," said she hastily, in order to retrieve her blunder, "that Captain John is not likely to go far away from the chance of a harbour until he sees whether this is the beginning of the equinoctials or not."

"The equinoctials?" said the Laird, anxiously.

"They sometimes begin as early as this; but not often. However, there will always be some place where we can run in to."

The equinoctials, indeed! When we went on deck again we found not only that those angry squalls had ceased, but that the wind had veered very considerably in our favour, and we were now running and plunging past Ardnamurchan Point. The rain had ceased too; the clouds had gathered themselves up in heavy folds; and their reflected blackness lay over the dark and heaving Atlantic plain. Well was it for these two women that luncheon had been taken in time. What one of them had dubbed the Ardnamurchan Wobble—which she declared to be as good a name for a waltz as the Liverpool Lurch—had begun in good earnest; and the *White Dove* was dipping, and rolling, and springing in the most lively fashion. There was not much chance for the Laird and Mary Avon to resume their promenade; when one of the men came aft to relieve John of Skye at the wheel, he had to watch his chance, and come clambering along by holding on to the shrouds, the rail of the gig, and so forth. But Dr. Sutherland's prescription had its

effect. Despite the Ardnamurchan Wobble and all its deeds, there was no ghostly and silent disappearance.

And so we ploughed on our way during the afternoon, the Atlantic appearing to grow darker and darker, as the clouds overhead seemed to get banked up more thickly. The only cheerful bit of light in this gloomy picture was a streak or two of sand at the foot of the sheer and rocky cliffs north of Ardnamurchan Light; and those we were rapidly leaving behind as the brisk breeze—with a kindness to which we were wholly strangers—kept steadily creeping round to the south.

The dark evening wore on, and we were getting well up towards Eigg, when a strange thing became visible along the western horizon. First the heavy purple clouds showed a tinge of crimson, and then a sort of yellow smoke appeared close down at the sea. This golden vapour widened, cleared until there was a broad belt of lemon-coloured sky all along the edge of the world; and in this wonder of shining light appeared the island of Rum—to all appearance as transparent as a bit of the thinnest gelatine, and in colour a light purple rose. It was really a most extraordinary sight. The vast bulk of this mountainous island, including the sombre giants Haleval and Haskeval, seemed to have less than the consistency of a cathedral window; it resembled more a pale, rose-coloured cloud; and the splendour of it, and the glow of the golden sky beyond, were all the more bewildering by reason of the gloom of the overhanging clouds that lay across like a black bar.

"Well!" said the Laird—and here he paused, for the amazement in his face could not at once find fitting words. "That beats a'!"

And it was a cheerful and friendly light too, that now came streaming over to us from beyond the horizon-line. It touched the sails and the varnished

spars with a pleasant colour. It seemed to warm and dry the air, and tempted the women to put aside their ulsters. Then began a series of wild endeavours to achieve a walk on deck, interrupted every second or two by some one or other being thrown against the boom, or having to grasp at the shrouds in passing. But it resulted in exercise, at all events; and meanwhile we were still making our way northward, with the yellow star of Isle Ornsay lighthouse beginning to be visible in the gathering dusk.

That evening at dinner the secret came out. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the disclosure of it had been carefully planned by these two conspirators: and that they considered themselves amazingly profound in giving to it a careless and improvised air.

"I never sit down to dinner now, ma'am," observed the Laird, in a light and graceful manner, "without a feeling that there is something wanting in the saloon. The table is not symmetrical. That should occur to Miss Mary's eye at once. One at the head, one my side, two yours: no, that is not as symmetrical as it used to be."

"Do you think I do not feel that too?" says his hostess. "And that is not the only time at which I wish that Angus were back with us."

No one had a word to say for poor Howard Smith, who used to sit at the foot of the table, in a meek and helpful capacity. No one thought of summoning him back to make the arrangement symmetrical. Perhaps he was being consoled by Messrs. Hughes, Barnes, and Barnes.

"And the longer the nights are growing, I get to miss him more and more," she says, with a beautiful pathos in her look. "He was always so full of activity and cheerfulness—the way he enjoyed life on board the yacht was quite infectious; and then his constant plans and suggestions. And how he looked forward to this long trip! though, to be sure, he struggled hard

against the temptation. I know the least thing would have turned the scale, Italy or no Italy."

"Why, ma'am," says the Laird, laughing prodigiously, "I should not wonder, if you sent him a message at this minute, to find him coming along post-haste and joining us, after all. What is Eetaly? I have been in Eetaly myself. Ye might live there a hundred years, and never see anything so fine in colour as that sunset we saw this very evening. And if it is business he is after, bless me! cannot a young man be a young man sometimes, and have the courage to do something imprudent? Come now, write to him at once! I will take the responsibility myself."

"To tell you the truth, sir," said the other timidly —but she pretends she is very anxious about the safety of a certain distant wine-glass—"I took a sudden notion into my head yesterday morning, and sent him a message."

"Dear me!" he cries. The hypocrite!

And Mary Avon all the while sits mute, dismayed, not daring to turn her face to the light. And the small white hand that holds the knife: why does it tremble so?

"The fact is," says Queen Titania carelessly, just as if she were reading a bit out of a newspaper, "I sent him a telegram, to save time. And I thought it would be more impressive if I made it a sort of round-robin, don't you know—as far as that can be done on a telegraph-form—and I said that each and all of us demanded his instant return, and that we should wait about Isle Ornsay or Loch Hourn until he joined us. So you see, sir, we may have to try your patience for a day or two."

"Ye may try it, but ye will not find it wanting," said the Laird, with serious courtesy. "I do not care how long I wait for the young man, so long as I am in such pleasant society. Ye forget, ma'am, what life one is obliged to live at Denny-mains, with public affairs

worrying one from the morning till the night. Patience? I have plenty of patience. But all the same I would like to see the young man here. I have a great respect for him, though I consider that some of his views may not be quite sound—that will mend—that will mend: and now, my good friends, I will take leave to propose a toast to ye."

We knew the Laird's old-fashioned ways, and had grown to humour them. There was a pretence of solemnly filling glasses.

"I am going," said the Laird, in a formal manner, "to propose to ye the quick and safe return of a friend. May all good fortune attend him on his way, and may happiness await him at the end of his journey!"

There was no dissentient; but there was one small white hand somewhat unsteady, as the girl, abashed and trembling and silent, touched the glass with her lips.

CHAPTER XLIII.

EXPECTATIONS.

It was a fine piece of acting. These two continued to talk about the coming of our young Doctor as if it were the most simple and ordinary affair possible. All its bearings were discussed openly, to give you to understand that Mary Avon had nothing in the world to do with it. It was entirely a practical arrangement for the saving of time. By running across to Paris he would jump over the interval between our leaving West Loch Tarbert and this present setting-out for the north. Mary Avon was asked about this point and that point: there was no reason why she should not talk about Angus Sutherland just like any other.

And, indeed, there was little call for any pale apprehension on the face of the girl, or for any quick look round when a sudden sound was heard. It was not possible for Angus to be anywhere in our neighbourhood as yet. When we went on deck next morning, we found that we had been idly drifting about all night, and that we were now far away from any land. The morning sun was shining on the dark green woods of Armadale, and on the little white sharp point of Isle Ornsay lighthouse, and on the vast heather-purpled hills in the north; while over there the mountains above Loch Hourn were steeped in a soft mysterious shadow. And then, by and by, after breakfast, some light puffs of westerly wind began to ruffle the glassy surface of the sea; and the *White Dove* almost insensibly drew nearer and nearer to the entrance of that winding loch that disappeared away within the dusky shadows of those overhanging hills. Late on as it was in the autumn, the sun was hot on the sails and the deck; and these cool breezes were welcome in a double sense.

We saw nothing of the accustomed gloom of Loch Hourn. The sheer sides of the great mountains were mostly in shadow, it is true; but then the ridges and plateaus were burning in the sunlight; and the waters of the loch around us were blue, and lapping, and cheerful. We knew only that the place was vast, and still, and silent; we could make out scarcely any sign of habitation.

Then, as the *White Dove* still glided on her way, we opened out a little indentation of the land behind an island; and there, nestled at the foot of the hill, we descried a small fishing-village. The cottages, the nets drying on the poles, the tiny patches of cultivated ground behind, all seemed quite toy-like against the giant and overhanging bulk of the hills. But again we drew away from Camus Ban—that is, the White Bay—and got further and further into the solitudes of

the mountains, and away from any traces of human life. When about mid-day we came to anchor, we found ourselves in a sort of cup within the hills, apparently shut off from all the outer world, and in a stillness so intense that the distant whistle of a curlew was quite startling. A breath of wind that blew over from the shore brought us a scent of honeysuckle.

At luncheon we found to our amazement that a fifth seat had been placed at table, and that plates, glasses, and what not had been laid for a guest. A guest in these wilds?—there was not much chance of such a thing, unless the King of the Seals or the Queen of the Mermaids were to come on board.

But when we had taken our seats, and were still regarding the vacant chair with some curiosity, the Laird's hostess was pleased to explain. She said to him with a shy smile,

"I have not forgotten what you said; and I quite agree with you that it balances the table better."

"But not an empty chair," said the Laird, severely; perhaps thinking it was an evil omen.

"You know the German song," said she, "and how the last remaining of the comrades filled the glasses with wine, and how the ghosts rattled the glasses. Would you kindly fill that glass, sir?"

She passed the decanter.

"I will not, begging your pardon," said the Laird, sternly, for he did not approve of these superstitions. And forthwith he took the deck-chair and doubled it up, and threw it on the couch. "We want the young man Sutherland here, and not any ghost. I doubt not but that he has reached London by now."

After that a dead silence. Were there any calculations about time; or were we wondering whether, amid the roar and whirl and moving life of the great city, he was thinking of the small floating-home far away, amid the solitude of the seas and the hills? The deck-chair was put aside, it is true, for the Laird

shrank from superstition; but the empty glass, and the plates and knives, and so forth, remained; and they seemed to say that our expected guest was drawing nearer and nearer.

"Well, John," said Queen Titania, getting on deck again, and looking round, "I think we have got into Fairyland at last."

John of Skye did not seem quite to understand, for his answer was—

"Oh, yes, mem, it is a fearful place for squahls."

"For squalls!" said she.

No wonder she was surprised. The sea around us was so smooth that the only motion visible on it was caused by an exhausted wasp that had fallen on the glassy surface and was making a series of small ripples in trying to get free again. And then, could anything be more soft and beautiful than the scene around us—the great mountains clad to the summit with the light foliage of the birch; silver waterfalls that made a vague murmur in the air; an island right ahead with picturesquely wooded rocks; an absolutely cloudless sky above—altogether a wonder of sunlight and fair colours? Squalls? The strange thing was, not that we had ventured into a region of unruly winds, but that we had got enough wind to bring us in at all. There was now not even enough to bring us the scent of the honeysuckle from the shore.

In the afternoon we set out on an expedition, nominally after wild-duck, but in reality in exploration of the upper reaches of the loch. We found a narrow channel between the island and the mainland, and penetrated into the calm and silent waters of Loch Hourn Beg. And still less did this offshoot of the larger loch accord with that gloomy name—the Lake of Hell. Even where the mountains were bare and forbidding, the warm evening light touched the granite with a soft rose-grey; and reflections of this beautiful colour were here and there visible amid the clear blue

of the water. We followed the windings of the narrow and tortuous loch; but found no wild-duck at all. Here and there a seal stared at us as we passed. Then we found a crofter's cottage, and landed, to the consternation of one or two handsome wild-eyed children. A purchase of eggs ensued, after much voluble Gaelic. We returned to the yacht.

That evening, as we sate on deck, watching the first stars beginning to tremble in the blue, some one called attention to a singular light that was beginning to appear along the summits of the mountains just over us—a silvery-grey light that showed us the soft foliage of the birches, while below the steep slopes grew more sombre as the night fell. And then we guessed that the moon was somewhere on the other side of the loch, as yet hidden from us by those black crags that pierced into the calm blue vault of the sky. This the Lake of Hell, indeed! By and by we saw the silver rim appear above the black line of the hills; and a pale glory was presently shining around us, particularly noticeable along the varnished spars. As the white moon sailed up, this solitary cup in the mountains was filled with the clear radiance, and the silence seemed to increase. We could hear more distinctly than ever the various waterfalls. The two women were walking up and down the deck; and each time that Mary Avon turned her profile to the light the dark eyebrows and dark eyelashes seemed darker than ever against the pale, sensitive, sweet face.

But after a while she gently disengaged herself from her friend, and came and sate down by the Laird: quite mutely, and waiting for him to speak. It is not to be supposed that she had been in any way more demonstrative towards him since his great act of kindness; or that there was any need for him to have purchased her affection. That was of older date. Perhaps, if the truth were told, she was rather less demonstrative now; for we had all discovered that the

Laird had a nervous horror of anything that seemed to imply a recognition of what he had done. It was merely, he had told us, a certain wrong thing he had put right: there was no more to be said about it.

However, her coming and sitting down by him was no unusual circumstance; and she meekly left him his own choice, to speak to her or not as he pleased. And he did speak—after a time.

"I was thinking," said he, "what a strange feeling ye get in living on board a yacht in these wilds: it is just as if ye were the only craytures in the world. Would ye not think, now, that the moon there belonged to this circle of hills, and could not be seen by any one outside it? It looks as if it were coming close to the topmast; how can ye believe that it is shining over Trafalgar Square in London?"

"It seems very close to us on so clear a night," says Mary Avon.

"And in a short time now," continued the Laird, "this little world of ours—I mean the little company on board the yacht—must be dashed into fragments, as it were; and ye will be away in London; and I will be at Denny-mains: and who knows whether we may ever see each other again? We must not grumble. It is the fate of the best friends. But there is one grand consolation—think what a consolation it must have been to many of the poor people who were driven away from these Highlands—to Canada, and Australia, and elsewhere—that after all the partings and sorrows of this world there is the great meeting-place at last. I would just ask this favour frae ye, my lass, that when ye go back to London, ye would get a book of our old Scotch psalm-tunes, and learn the tune that is called *Comfort*. It begins 'Take comfort, Christians, when your friends.' It is a grand tune that: I would like ye to learn it."

"Oh, certainly I will," said the girl.

"And I have been thinking," continued the Laird, "that I would get Tom Galbraith to make ye a bit

sketch of Denny-mains, that ye might hang up in London, if ye were so minded. It would show ye what the place was like; and after some years ye might begin to believe that ye really had been there, and that ye were familiar with it, as the home of an old friend o' yours."

"But I hope to see Denny-mains for myself, sir," said she, with some surprise.

A quick, strange look appeared for a moment on the old Laird's face. But presently he said—

"No, no, lass, ye will have other interests and other duties. That is but proper and natural. How would the world get on at all if we were not to be dragged here and there by diverse occupations?"

Then the girl spoke, proudly and bravely—

"And if I have any duties in the world, I think I know to whom I owe them. And it is not a duty at all, but a great pleasure; and you promised me, sir, that I was to see Denny-mains; and I wish to pay you a long, long, long visit."

"A long, long, long visit?" said the Laird cheerfully. "No, no, lass. I just couldna be bothered with ye. Ye would be in my way. What interest could ye take in our parish meetings, and the church *soirées*, and the like? No, no. But if ye like to pay me a short, short, short visit—at your own convenience, —at your own convenience, mind—I will get Tom Galbraith through from Edinburgh, and I will get out some of the younger Glasgow men; and if we do not, you and me, show them something in the way of landscape-sketching, that will just frighten them out of their very wits, why then I will give ye leave to say that my name is not Mary Avon."

He rose then and took her hand, and began to walk with her up and down the moonlit deck. We heard something about the Haughs o' Cromdale. The Laird was obviously not ill-pleased that she had boldly claimed that promised visit to Denny-mains.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"YE ARE WELCOME, GLENOGIE!"

When, after nearly three months of glowing summer weather, the heavens begin to look as if they meditated revenge; when, in a dead calm, a darkening gloom appears behind the further hills, and slight puffs of wind come down vertically, spreading themselves out on the glassy water; when the air is sultry, and an occasional low rumble is heard, and the sun looks white; then the reader of these pages may thank his stars that he is not in Loch Hourn. And yet it was not altogether our fault that we were nearly caught in this dangerous cup among the hills. We had lain in these silent and beautiful waters for two or three days, partly because of the exceeding loveliness of the place, partly because we had to allow Angus time to get up to Isle Ornsay, but chiefly because we had not the option of leaving. To get through the narrow and shallow channel by which we had entered we wanted both wind and tide in our favour; and there was scarcely a breath of air during the long, peaceful, shining days. At length, when our sovereign mistress made sure that the young Doctor must be waiting for us at Isle Ornsay, she informed Captain John that he must get us out of this place somehow.

"'Deed, I not sorry at all," said John of Skye, who had never ceased to represent to us, that, in the event of bad weather coming on, we should find ourselves in the lion's jaws.

Well, on the afternoon of the third day, it became very obvious that something serious was about to happen. Clouds began to bank up behind the mountains that overhung the upper reaches of the loch, and

an intense purple gloom gradually spread along those sombre hills—all the more intense that the little island in front of us, crossing the loch, burned in the sunlight a vivid strip of green. Then little puffs of wind fell here and there on the blue water and broadened out in a silvery grey. We noticed that all the men were on deck.

As the strange darkness of the loch increased, as these vast mountains overhanging the inner cup of the loch grew more and more awful in the gloom, we began to understand why the Celtic imagination had called this place the Lake of Hell. Captain John kept walking up and down somewhat anxiously, and occasionally looking at his watch. The question was whether we should get enough wind to take us through the narrows before the tide turned. In the mean time mainsail and jib were set, and the anchor hove short.

At last the welcome flapping and creaking and rattling of blocks! What although this brisk breeze came dead in our teeth? John of Skye, as he called all hands to the windlass, gave us to understand that he would rather beat through the neck of a bottle than lie in Loch Hourn that night.

And it was an exciting piece of business when we got further down the loch, and approached this narrow passage. On the one side sharp and sheer rocks; on the other shallow banks that shone through the water; behind us the awful gloom of gathering thunder; ahead of us a breeze that came tearing down from the hills in the most puzzling and varying squalls. With a steady wind it would have been bad enough to beat through those narrows; but this wind kept shifting about anyhow. Sharp was the word indeed. It was a question of seconds as we sheered away from the rocks on the one side, or from the shoals on the other. And then, amidst it all, a sudden cry from the women—

"John! John!"

John of Skye knows his business too well to attend to the squealing of women.

"Ready about!" he roars; and all hands are at the sheets, and even Master Fred is leaning over the bows, to watch the shallowness of the water.

"John, John!" the women cry.

"Haul up the main tack, Hector! Ay, that'll do. Ready about, boys!"

But this starboard tack is a little bit longer, and John manages to cast an impatient glance behind him. The sailor's eye in an instant detects that distant object. What is it? Why, surely some one in the stern of a rowing-boat, standing up and violently waving a white handkerchief, and two men pulling like mad creatures.

"John, John! Don't you see it is Angus Sutherland!" cries the older woman pitifully.

By this time we are going bang on to a sandbank; and the men, standing by the sheets, are amazed that the skipper does not put his helm down. Instead of that—and all this happens in an instant—he eases the helm up, the bows of the yacht fall away from the wind, and just clear the bank. Hector of Moidart jumps to the mainsheet and slacks it out, and then, behold! the *White Dove* is running free, and there is a sudden silence on board.

"Why, he must have come over from the Caledonian Canal!" says Queen Titania, in great excitement. "Oh, how glad I am!"

But John of Skye takes advantage of this breathing space to have another glance at his watch.

"We'll maybe beat the tide yet," he says confidently.

And who is this who comes joyously clambering up, and hauls his portmanteau after him, and throws a couple of half-crowns into the bottom of the black boot?

"Oh, Angus!" his hostess cries to him, "you will shake hands with us all afterwards. We are in a

dreadful strait. Never mind us—help John if you can."

Meanwhile Captain John has again put the nose of the *White Dove* at these perilous narrows; and the young Doctor—perhaps glad enough to escape embarrassment among all this clamour—has thrown his coat off to help; and the men have got plenty of anchor-chain on deck, to let go the anchor if necessary; and then again begins that manœuvring between the shallows and the rocks. What is this new sense of completeness—of added life—of briskness and gladness? Why do the men seem more alert? and why this cheeriness in Captain John's shouted commands? The women are no longer afraid of either banks or shoals; they rather enjoy the danger; when John seems determined to run the yacht through a mass of conglomerate, they know that with the precision of clock-work she will be off on the other tack; and they are laughing at these narrow escapes. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that only one of them laughs. Mary Avon is somewhat silent, and she holds her friend's hand tight.

Tide or no tide, we get through the narrow channel at last; and every one breathes more freely when we are in the open. But we are still far from being out of Loch Hourn; and now the mountains in the south, too—one of them apparently an extinct volcano—have grown black as night; and the wind that comes down from them in jerks and squalls threatens to plunge our bulwarks under water. How the *White Dove* flees away from this gathering gloom! Once or twice we hear behind us a roar, and turning we can see a specially heavy squall tearing across the loch; but here with us the wind continues to keep a little more steady, and we go bowling along at a whirling pace. Angus Sutherland comes aft, puts on his coat, and makes his formal entry into our society.

"You have just got out in time," says he, laughing

somewhat nervously, to his hostess. "There will be a wild night in Loch Hourn to-night."

"And the beautiful calm we have had in there!" she says. "We were beginning to think that Loch Hourn was Fairyland."

"Look!" he said.

And indeed the spectacle behind us was of a nature to make us thankful that we had slipped out of the lion's jaws. The waters of the loch were being torn into spindrift by the squalls; and the black clouds overhead were being dragged into shreds as if by invisible hands; and in the hollows below appeared a darkness as if night had come on prematurely. And still the *White Dove* flew and flew, as if she knew of the danger behind her; and by and by we were plunging and racing across the Sound of Sleat. We had seen the last of Loch Hourn.

The clear golden ray of Isle Ornsay lighthouse was shining through the dusk as we made in for the sheltered harbour. We had ran the dozen miles or so in a little over the hour; and now dinner-time had arrived; and we were not sorry to be in comparatively smooth water. The men were sent ashore with some telegram—the sending off of which was the main object of our running in here; and then Master Fred's bell summoned us below from the wild and windy night.

How rich and warm and cheerful was this friendly glow of the candles, and how compact the table seemed now, with the vacant space filled at last! And every one appeared to be talking hard, in order to show that Angus Sutherland's return was a quite ordinary and familiar thing; and the Laird was making his jokes; and the young Doctor telling his hostess how he had been sending telegrams here and there until he had learned of the *White Dove* having been seen going in to Loch Hourn. Even Miss Avon, though she said but little, shared in this general excitement and pleasure. We could hear her soft laughter from time

to time. But her eyes were kept away from the corner where Angus Sutherland sate.

"Well, you *are* lucky people," said he. "If you had missed getting out of that hole by half an hour, you might have been shut up in it a fortnight. I believe a regular gale from the south has begun."

"It is you who have brought it then," said his hostess, "You are the stormy petrel. And you did your best to make us miss the tide."

"I think we shall have some sailing now," said he, rubbing his hands in great delight—he pretends to be thinking only of the yacht. "John talks of going on to-night, so as to slip through the Kyle Rhea narrows with the first of the flood-tide in the morning."

"Going out to-night!" she exclaimed. "Is it you who have put that madness into his head? It must be pitch dark already. And a gale blowing!"

"Oh, no!" he said, laughing. "There is not much of a gale. And it cannot be very dark with the moon behind the clouds."

Here a noise above told us the men had come back from the small village. They brought a telegram too; but it was of no consequence. Presently—in fact, as soon as he decently could—Angus left the dinner-table, and went on deck. He had scarcely dared to glance at the pale sensitive face opposite him.

By and by Queen Titania said, solemnly:

"Listen!"

There was no doubt about it; the men were weighing anchor.

"That madman," said she, "has persuaded Captain John to go to sea again—at this time of night!"

"It was Captain John's own wish. He wishes to catch the tide in the morning," observed Miss Avon, with her eyes cast down.

"That's right, my lass," said the Laird. "Speak up for them who are absent. But, indeed, I think I will go on deck myself now, to see what's going on."

We all went on deck, and there and then unanimously passed a vote of approval on Captain John's proceedings, for the wind had moderated very considerably; and there was a pale suffused light telling of the moon being somewhere behind the fleecy clouds in the south-east. With much content we perceived that the *White Dove* was already moving out of the dark little harbour. We heard the rush of the sea outside without much concern.

It was a pleasant sailing night after all. When we had stolen by the glare of the solitary lighthouse, and got into the open, we found there was no very heavy sea running, while there was a steady serviceable breeze from the south. There was moonlight abroad too, though the moon was mostly invisible behind the thin drifting clouds. The women, wrapped up, sate hand-in-hand, and chatted to each other; the Doctor was at the tiller; the Laird was taking an occasional turn up and down, sometimes pausing to challenge general attention by some profound remark.

And very soon we began to perceive that Angus Sutherland had by some inscrutable means got into the Laird's good graces in a most marked degree. Denny-mains, on this particular night, as we sailed away northward, was quite complimentary about the march of modern science, and the service done to humanity by scientific men. He had not even an ill word for the *Vestiges of Creation*. He went the length of saying that he was not scholar enough to deny that there might be various ways of interpreting the terms of the Mosaic chronology; and expressed a great interest in the terribly remote people who must have lived in the lake-dwellings.

"Oh, don't you believe that!" said our steersman good-naturedly. "The scientifics are only humbugging the public about those lake-dwellings. They were only the bath-houses and wash-houses of a comparatively modern and civilised race, just as you see

them now on the Lake of a Thousand Islands, and at the mouths of the Amazon, and even on the Rhine. Surely you know the bath-houses built on piles on the Rhine?"

"Dear me!" said the Laird, "that is extremely interesting. It is a novel view—a most novel view. But then the remains—what of the remains? The earthen cups and platters: they must have belonged to a very preemitive race?"

"Not a bit," said the profound scientific authority, with a laugh. "They were the things the children amused themselves with, when their nurses took them down there to be out of the heat and the dust. They were a very advanced race indeed. Even the children could make earthen cups and saucers, while the children now-a-days can only make mud-pies."

"Don't believe him, sir!" their hostess called out; "he is only making a fool of us all."

"Ay, but there's something in it—there's something in it," said the Laird seriously; and he took a step or two up and down the deck, in deep meditation. "There's something in it. It's plausible. If it is not sound, it is an argument. It would be a good stick to break over an ignorant man's head."

Suddenly the Laird began to laugh aloud.

"Bless me," said he, "if I could only inveigle Johnny Guthrie into an argument about that! I would give it him! I would give it him!"

This was a shocking revelation. What had come over the Laird's conscience that he actually proposed to inveigle a poor man into a controversy and then to hit him over the head with a sophistical argument? We could not have believed it. And here he was laughing and chuckling to himself over that shameful scheme.

Our attention, however, was at this moment suddenly drawn away from moral questions. The rapidly driving clouds just over the wild mountains of Loch Hourn

parted, and the moon glared out on the tumbling waves. But what a curious moon it was!—pale and watery, with a white halo around it, and with another faintly-coloured halo outside that again whenever the slight and vapoury clouds crossed. John of Skye came aft.

"I not like the look of that moon," said John of Skye to the Doctor, but in an undertone, so that the women should not hear.

"Nor I either," said the other, in an equally low voice. "Do you think we are going to have the equinoctials, John?"

"Oh no, not yet. It is not the time for the equinoctials yet."

And as we crept on through the night, now and again from amid the wild and stormy clouds above Loch Hourn the wan moon still shone out; and then we saw something of the silent shores we were passing, and of the awful mountains overhead, stretching far into the darkness of the skies. Then preparations were made for coming to anchor; and by and by the *White Dove* was brought round to the wind. We were in a bay—if bay it could be called—just south of Kyle Rhea narrows. There was nothing visible along the pale moonlit shore.

"This is a very open place to anchor in, John," our young Doctor ventured to remark.

"But it is a good holding-ground; and we will be away early in the morning whatever."

And so, when the anchor was swung out, and quiet restored over the vessel, we proceeded to get below. There were a great many things to be handed down; and a careful search had to be made that nothing was forgotten—we did not want to find soaked shawls or books lying on the deck in the morning. But at length all this was settled too, and we were assembled once more in the saloon.

We were assembled—all but two.

"Where is Miss Mary?" said the Laird cheerfully: he was always the first to miss his companion.

"Perhaps she is in her cabin," said his hostess somewhat nervously.

"And your young Doctor—why does he not come down and have his glass of toddy like a man?" said the Laird, getting his own tumbler. "The young men now-a-days are just as frightened as children. What with their chemistry, and their tubes, and their percentages of alcohol: there was none of that nonsense when I was a young man. People took what they liked, so long as it agreed with them; and will anybody tell me there is any harm in a glass of good Scotch whisky?"

She does not answer; she looks somewhat preoccupied and anxious.

"Ay, ay," continues the Laird, reaching over for the sugar; "if people would only stop there, there is nothing in the world makes such an excellent nightcap as a single glass of good Scotch whisky. Now, ma'am, I will just beg you to try half a glass of my brewing."

She pays no attention to him. For first of all she now hears a light step on the companion-way, and then the door of the ladies' cabin is opened, and shut again. Then a heavy step on the companion-way, and Dr. Sutherland comes into the saloon. There is a strange look on his face—not of dejection; but he tries to be very reticent and modest, and is inordinately eager in handing a knife to the Laird for the cutting of a lemon.

"Where is Mary, Angus?" said his hostess, looking at him.

"She has gone into your cabin," said he, looking up with a sort of wistful appeal in his eyes. As plainly as possible they said, "Won't you go to her?"

The unspoken request was instantly answered; she got up and quietly left the saloon.

"Come, lad," said the Laird. "Are ye afraid to

try a glass of Scotch whisky? You chemical men know too much: that is not wholesome; and you a Scotchman too—take a glass, man!"

"Twelve, if you like," said the Doctor, laughing; "but one will do for my purpose. I'm going to follow your example, sir; I am going to propose a toast. It is a good old custom."

This was a proposal after the Laird's own heart. He insisted on the women being summoned; and they came. He took no notice that Mary Avon was rose-red, and downcast of face; and that the elder woman held her hand tightly, and had obviously been crying a little bit—not tears of sorrow. When they were seated, he handed each a glass. Then he called for silence, waiting to hear our Doctor make a proper and courtly speech about his hostess, or about the *White Dove*, or John of Skye, or anything.

But what must have been the Laird's surprise when he found that it was his own health that was being proposed! And that not in the manner of the formal oratory that the Laird admired, but in a very simple and straightforward speech, that had just a touch of personal and earnest feeling in it. For the young Doctor spoke of the long days and nights we had spent together, far away from human ken; and how intimately associated people became on board ship; and how thoroughly one could learn to know and love a particular character through being brought into such close relationship. And he said that friendships thus formed in a week or a month might last for a lifetime. And he could not say much, before the very face of the Laird, about all those qualities which had gained for him something more than our esteem—qualities especially valuable on board ship—good humour, patience, courtesy, light-heartedness——

"Bless me," cried the Laird, interrupting the speaker in defiance of all the laws that govern public oratory, "I maun stop this—I maun stop this! Are ye all

come together to make fun of me—eh? Have a care —have a care!"

He looked round threateningly; and his eye lighted with a darker warning on Mary Avon.

"That lass, too," said he; "and I thought her a friend of mine; and she has come to make a fool of me like the rest! And so ye want to make me the Homesh o' this boat? Well, I may be a foolish old man; but my eyes are open. I know what is going on. Come here, my lass, until I tell ye something."

Mary Avon went and took the seat next him; and he put his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Young people will have their laugh and their joke," said he.

"It was no joke at all!" said she warmly.

"Whisht, now. I say young people will have their laugh and their joke at a foolish old man; and who is to prevent them? Not me. But I'll tell ye what: ye may have your sport of me, on one condition."

He patted her once or twice on the shoulder, just as if she was a child.

"And the condition is this, my lass—that ye have the wedding at Denny-mains."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE EQUINOCTIALS AT LAST.

THERE was no dreaming of weddings at Denny-mains, or elsewhere, for some of us that night. It had been blowing pretty hard when we turned in; but towards two or three o'clock the wind increased to half a gale, while heavy showers kept rattling along the decks. Then there were other sounds. One of the men was heard to clamber up the iron ladder of the forecastle;

and as soon as he had put his head out, his contented exclamation was, "Oh, ferry well; go on!" Then he came below and roused his companions. Presently there was a loud commotion on deck. This was enough for our Doctor. One could hear him rapidly dressing in his little state-room—then staggering through the saloon, for the wind was knocking about the *White Dove* considerably—then groping his way up the dark companion. For some time there was a fine turmoil going on above. Another anchor was thrown out. The gig and dingay were brought in on deck. All the skylights were fastened down, and the tarpaulins put over. Then a woman's voice—

"Angus! Angus!"

The Doctor came tumbling down the companion; by this time we had got a candle lit in the saloon.

"What is it?" was heard from the partly opened door of the ladies' cabin.

"Nothing at all. A bit of a breeze has sprung up."

"Mary says you must stay below. Never mind what it is. You are not to go on deck again."

"Very well."

He came into the saloon—all wet and dripping, but exceedingly pleased to have been thus thought of—and then he said in a tragic whisper:

"We are in for it at last."

"The equinoctials?"

"Yes."

So we turned in again, leaving the *White Dove* to haul and strain at her cables all through the night—swaying, pitching, groaning, creaking, as if she would throw herself free of her anchors altogether, and sweep away over to Glenelg.

Then, in the early morning, the gale had apparently increased. While the women-folk remained in their cabin, the others of us adventured up the companion-way, and had a look out. It was not a cheerful sight. All around the green sea was being torn along by the

heavy wind; the white crests of the waves being whirled up in smoke; the surge springing high on the rocks over by Glenelg; the sky almost black overhead; the mountains that ought to have been quite near us invisible behind the flying mists of the rain. Then how the wind howled! Ordinarily the sound was a low, moaning bass—even lower than the sound of the waves; but then again it would increase and rise into a shrill whistle, mostly heard, one would have said, from about the standing rigging and the cross-trees. But our observation of these phenomena was brief, intermittent, and somewhat ignominious. We had to huddle in the companion-way like Jacks-in-the-box; for the incautiously protruded head was liable to be hit by a blast of rain that came along like a charge of No. 6 shot. Then we tumbled below for breakfast, and the scared women-folk made their appearance.

"The equinoctials, Angus?" said Queen Titania, with some solemnity of face.

"Oh, I suppose so," said he cheerfully.

"Well, I have been through them two or three times before," said she, "but never in an exposed place like this."

"We shall fight through it first-rate," said he—and you should have seen Mary Avon's eyes; she was clearly convinced that fifteen equinoctial gales could not do us the slightest harm so long as this young Doctor was on board. "It is a fine stroke of luck that the gale is from the south-west. If it had come on from the east, we should have been in a bad way. As it is, there is not a rock between here and the opposite shore at Glenelg, and even if we drag our anchors, we shall catch up somewhere at the other side."

"I hope we shall not have to trust to that," says Queen Titania, who in her time has seen something of the results of vessels dragging their anchors.

As the day wore on, the fury of the gale still increased: the wind moaning and whistling by turns, the yacht straining at her cables, and rolling and heaving about. Despite the tender entreaties of the women, Dr. Angus would go on deck again; for now Captain John had resolved on lowering the topmast, and also on getting the boom and mainsail from their crutch down on to the deck. Being above in this weather was far from pleasant. The showers occasionally took the form of hail; and so fiercely were the pellets driven by the wind that they stung where they hit the face. And the outlook around was dismal enough—the green sea and its whirling spindrift; the heavy waves breaking all along the Glenelg shores; the writhing of the gloomy sky. We had a companion, by the way, in this exposed place—a great black schooner that heavily rolled and pitched as she strained at her two anchors. The skipper of her did not leave her bows for a moment the whole day, watching for the first symptom of dragging.

Then that night. As the darkness came over, the wind increased in shrillness until it seemed to tear with a scream through the rigging; and though we were fortunately under the lee of the Skye hills, we could hear the water smashing on the bows of the yacht. As night fell that shrill whistling and those recurrent shocks grew in violence, until we began to wonder how long the cables would hold.

"And if our anchors give, I wonder where we shall go to," said Queen Titania, in rather a low voice.

"I don't care," said Miss Avon, quite contentedly.

She was seated at dinner; and had undertaken to cut up and mix some salad that Master Fred had got at Loch Hourn. She seemed wholly engrossed in that occupation. She offered some to the Laird, very prettily; and he would have taken it if it had been hemlock. But when she said she did not care where the *White Dove* might drift to, we knew very well

what she meant. And some of us may have thought that a time would perhaps arrive when the young lady would not be able to have everything she cared for in the world within the compass of the saloon of a yacht.

Now it is perhaps not quite fair to tell tales out of school; but still the truth is the truth. The two women were on the whole very brave throughout this business; but on that particular night the storm grew more and more violent, and it occurred to them that they would escape the risk of being rolled out of their berths if they came along into the saloon and got some rugs laid on the floor. This they did; and the noise of the wind and the sea was so great that none of the occupants of the adjoining state-rooms heard them. But then it appeared that no sooner had they lain down on the floor—it is unnecessary to say that they were dressed and ready for any emergency—than they were mightily alarmed by the swishing of water below them.

"Mary! Mary!" said the one, "the sea is rushing into the hold."

The other, knowing less about yachts, said nothing; but no doubt, with the admirable unselfishness of lovers, thought it was not of much consequence, since Angus Sutherland and she would be drowned together.

But what was to be done? The only way to the forecastle was through the Doctor's state-room. There was no help for it; they first knocked at his door, and called to him that the sea was rushing into the hold; and then he bawled into the forecastle until Master Fred, the first to awake, made his appearance, rubbing his knuckles into his eyes and saying, "Very well, sir; is it hot water or cold water ye want?" and then there was a general commotion of the men getting on deck to try the pumps. And all this brave uproar for nothing. There was scarcely a gallon of water in the hold; but the women, by putting their heads close to the floor of the saloon, had imagined that the sea was

rushing in on them. Such is the story of this night's adventures as it was subsequently—and with some shamefacedness—related to the writer of these pages. There are some people who when they go to sleep, sleep, and refuse to pay heed to twopenny-halfpenny tumults.

Next morning the state of affairs was no better; but there was this point in our favour, that the *White Dove*, having held on so long, was not now likely to drag her anchors and precipitate us on the Glenelg shore. Again we had to pass the day below, with the running accompaniment of pitching and groaning on the part of the boat, and of the shrill clamour of the wind, and the rattling of heavy showers. But as we sat at luncheon, a strange thing occurred. A burst of sunlight suddenly came through the skylight and filled the saloon, moving backwards and forwards on the blue cushions as the yacht swayed, and delighting everybody with the unexpected glory of colour. You may suppose that there was little more thought of luncheon. There was an instant stampede for waterproofs and a clambering up the companion-way. Did not this brief burst of sunlight portend the passing over of the gale? Alas! alas! when we got on deck, we found the scene around us as wild and stormy as ever, with even a heavier sea now racing up the Sound and thundering along Glenelg. Hopelessly we went below again. The only cheerful feature of our imprisonment was the obvious content of those two young people. They seemed perfectly satisfied with being shut up in this saloon; and were always quite surprised when Master Fred's summons interrupted their draughts or bézique.

On the third day the wind came in intermittent squalls, which was something; and occasionally there was a glorious burst of sunshine that went flying across the grey-green driven sea. But for the most part it rained heavily; and the Ferdinand and Miranda busi-

ness was continued with much content. The Laird had lost himself in *Municipal London*. Our Admiral-in-chief was writing voluminous letters to two youths at school in Surrey, which were to be posted if ever we reached land again.

That night about ten o'clock a cheering incident occurred. We heard the booming of a steam-whistle. Getting up on deck, we could make out the lights of a steamer creeping along by the Glenelg shore. That was the *Clydesdale* going north. Would she have faced Ardnamurchan if the equinoctials had not moderated somewhat? These were friendly lights.

Then on the fourth day it became quite certain that the gale was moderating. The bursts of sunshine became more frequent; patches of brilliant blue appeared in the sky; a rainbow from time to time appeared between us and the black clouds in the east. With what an intoxication of joy we got out at last from our long imprisonment, and felt the warm sunlight around us, and watched the men get ready to lower the gig so as to establish once more our communications with the land. Mary Avon would boldly have adventured into that tumbling and rocking thing—she implored to be allowed to go; if the Doctor were going to pull stroke, why should she not be allowed to steer? But she was forcibly restrained. Then away went the shapely boat through the plunging waters—showers of spray sweeping her from stem to stern—until it disappeared into the little bight of Kyle Rhea.

The news brought back from the shore of the destruction wrought by this gale—the worst that had visited these coasts for three-and-twenty years—was terrible enough; and it was coupled with the most earnest warnings that we should not set out. But the sunlight had got into the brain of these long-imprisoned people, and sent them mad. They implored the doubting John of Skye to get ready to start. They promised that if only he would run up to Kyle Akin,

they would not ask him to go further, unless the weather was quite fine. To move—to move—that was their only desire and cry.

John of Skye shook his head; but so far humoured them as to weigh one of the anchors. By and by, too, he had the topmast hoisted again: all this looked more promising. Then, as the afternoon came on, and the tide would soon be turning, they renewed their entreaties. John, still doubting, at length yielded.

Then the joyful uproar! All hands were summoned to the halyards, for the mainsail, soaked through with the rain, was about as stiff as a sheet of iron. And the weighing of the second anchor—that was a cheerful sound indeed. We paid scarcely any heed to this white squall that was coming tearing along from the south. It brought both rain and sunlight with it: for a second or two we were enveloped in a sort of glorified mist—then the next minute we found a rainbow shining between us and the black hull of the smack; presently we were in glowing sunshine again. And then at last the anchor was got up, and the sails filled to the wind, and the mainsheet slackened out. The *White Dove*, released once more, was flying away to the northern seas!

CHAPTER XLVI.

"FLIEH! AUF! HINAUS!"

THIS splendid sense of life, and motion, and brisk excitement! We flew through the narrows like a bolt from a bow; we had scarcely time to regard the whirling eddies of the current. All hands were on the alert too, for the wind came in gusts from the Skye hills, and this tortuous strait is not a pleasant place to be

taken unawares in. But the watching and work were altogether delightful, after our long imprisonment. Even the grave John of Skye was whistling "Fhir a bhata" to himself—somewhat out of tune.

The wild and stormy sunset was shining all along the shores of Loch Alsh as we got out of the narrows and came in sight of Kyle Akin. And here were a number of vessels all storm-stayed, one of them, in the distance, with her sail set. We discovered afterwards that this schooner had dragged her anchors and run ashore at Balmacara; she was more fortunate than many others that suffered in this memorable gale, and was at the moment we passed returning to her former anchorage.

The sunlight and the delight of moving had certainly got into the heads of these people. Nothing would do for them but that John of Skye should go on sailing all night. Kyle Akin? they would not hear of Kyle Akin. And it was of no avail that Captain John told them what he had heard ashore—that the *Glencoe* had to put back with her bulwarks smashed; that here, there, and everywhere vessels were on the rocks; that Stornoway harbour was full of foreign craft, not one of which would put her nose out. They pointed to the sea, and the scene around them. It was a lovely sunset. Would not the moon be up by eleven?

"Well, mem," said John of Skye, with a humorous smile, "I think if we go on the night, there not mich chance of our rinning against anything."

And indeed he was not to be outbraved by a couple of women. When we got to Kyle Akin, the dusk beginning to creep over land and sea, he showed no signs of running in there for shelter. We pushed through the narrow straits, and came in view of the darkening plain of the Atlantic, opening away up there to the north, and as far as we could see there was not a single vessel but ourselves on all this world of water. The gloom deepened; in under the mountains of Skye

there was a darkness as of midnight. But one could still make out ahead of us the line of the Scalpa shore, marked by the white breaking of the waves. Even when that grew invisible we had Rona light to steer by.

The stormy and unsettled look of the sunset had prepared us for something of a dirty night, and as we went on both wind and sea increased considerably. The south-westerly breeze that had brought us so far at a spanking rate began to veer round to the north, and came in violent squalls, while the long swell running down between Raasay and Scalpa and the mainland caused the *White Dove* to labour heavily. Moreover, the night got as black as pitch, the moon had not arisen, and it was lucky, in this laborious beating up against the northerly squalls, that we had the distant Rona light by which to judge of our whereabouts.

The two women were huddled together in the companion-way; it was the safest place for them; we could just make out the two dark figures in the ruddy glow coming up from the saloon.

"Isn't it splendid to be going like this," said Miss Avon, "after lying at anchor so long?"

Her friend did not answer. She had been chiefly instrumental in persuading Captain John to keep on during the night, and she did not quite like the look of things. For one thing, she had perceived that the men were all now clad from head to foot in oilskins, though as yet there was nothing but spray coming on board.

Our young Doctor came aft, and tried to get down the companion-way without disturbing the two women.

"I am going below for my waterproof and leggings," said he, with a slight laugh. "There will be some fun before this night is over."

The tone of the girl altered in a moment.

"Oh, Angus," said she, grasping him by the arm. "Pray don't do that! Leave the men to work the

boat. If there is any danger, why don't they make away for the land somewhere?"

"There is no danger," said he, "but there will be a little water by and by."

The volume of the great waves was certainly increasing, and a beautiful sight it was to mark the red port-light shining on the rushing masses of foam as they swept by the side of the vessel. Our whereabouts by this time had become wholly a matter of conjecture with the amateurs, for the night was quite black; however, Rona light still did us good service.

When Angus Sutherland came on deck again, she was on the port tack, and the wind had moderated somewhat. But this proved to be a lull of evil omen. There was a low roar heard in the distance, and almost directly a violent squall from the east struck the yacht, sending the boom flying over before the skipper could get hold of the mainsheet. Away flew the *White Dove* like an arrow, with the unseen masses of water smashing over her bows!

"In with the mizen, boys!" called out John of Skye, and there was a hurried clatter and stamping, and flapping of canvas.

But that was not enough, for this unexpected squall from the east showed permanence, and as we were making in for the Sound of Scalpa we were now running free before the wind.

"We'll tek the foresail off her, boys!" shouted John of Skye again, and presently there was another rattle down on the deck.

Onwards and onwards we flew, in absolute darkness but for that red light that made the sea shine like a foaming sea of blood. And the pressure of the wind behind increased until it seemed likely to tear the canvas off her spars.

"Down with the jib, then!" called out John of Skye; and we heard, but could not see, the men at work forward. And still the *White Dove* flew onwards

through the night, and the wind howled and whistled through the rigging, and the boiling surges of foam swept away from her side. There was no more of Rona light to guide us now; we were tearing through the Sound of Scalpa; and still this hurricane seemed to increase in fury. As a last resource, John of Skye had the peak lowered. We had now nothing left but a mainsail about the size of a pocket-handkerchief.

As the night wore on, we got into more sheltered waters, being under the lee of Scalpa; and we crept away down between that island and Skye, seeking for a safe anchorage. It was a business that needed a sharp look-out, for the waters are shallow here, and we discovered one or two smacks at anchor, with no lights up. They did not expect any vessel to run in from the open on a night like this.

And at last we chose our place for the night, letting go both anchors. Then we went below, into the saloon.

"And how do you like sailing in the equinoctials, Mary?" said our hostess.

"I am glad we are all round this table again, and alive," said the girl.

"I thought you said the other day you did not care whether the yacht went down or not?"

"Of the two," remarked Miss Avon shyly, "it is perhaps better that she should be afloat."

Angus was passing at the moment. He put his hand lightly on her shoulder, and said, in a kind way—

"It is better not to tempt the unknown, Mary. Remember what the French proverb says, 'Quand on est mort, c'est pour longtemps.' And you know you have not nearly completed that great series of *White Dove* sketches for the smoking-room at Denny-mains."

"The smoking-room!" exclaimed the Laird, indignantly. "There is not one of her sketches that will not have a place—an honoured place—in my dining-

room: depend on that. Ye will see—both of ye—what I will do with them; and the sooner ye come to see the better."

We this evening resolved that if, by favour of the winds and the valour of John of Skye, we got up to Portree next day, we should at once telegraph to the island of Lewis (where we proposed to cease these summer wanderings) to inquire about the safety of certain friends of ours whom we meant to visit there, and who are much given to yachting; for the equinoctials must have blown heavily into Loch Roag, and the little harbour at Borva is somewhat exposed. However, it was not likely that they would allow themselves to be caught. They know something about the sea, and about boats, at Borva.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AFTER THE GALE.

"WELL, indeed!" exclaimed the Laird, on putting his head out next morning. "This is wonderful—wonderful!"

Was it the long imprisonment in the darkness of the equinoctials that made him welcome with so much delight this spectacle of fair skies and sapphire seas, with the waves breaking white in Scalpa Sound, and the sunlight shining along the Coolins? Or was it not rather our long isolation from the ordinary affairs of the world that made him greet with acclamation this picture of brisk and busy human life, now visible from the deck of the yacht? We were no longer alone in the world. Over there, around the big black smacks—that looked like so many hens with broods of chickens—swarmed a fleet of fishing boats; and as rapidly as

hands could manage it, both men and women were shaking out the brown nets and securing the glittering silver treasure of the sea. It was a picturesque sight —the stalwart brown-bearded men in their yellow oil-skins and huge boots; the bare-armed women in their scarlet short-gowns; the masses of ruddy brown nets; the lowered sails. And then the Laird perceived that he was not alone in regarding this busy and cheerful scene.

Along there by the bulwarks, with one hand on the shrouds and the other on the gig, stood Mary Avon, apparently watching the boats passing to and fro between the smacks and the shore. The Laird went gently up to her, and put his hand on her shoulder. She started, turned round suddenly, and then he saw, to his dismay, that her eyes were full of tears.

"What, what?" said he, with a quick doubt and fear coming over him. Had all his plans failed, then? Was the girl still unhappy?

"What is it, lass? What is the matter?" said he, gripping her hand so as to get the truth from her.

By this time she had dried her eyes.

"Nothing—nothing," said she, rather shamefacedly. "I was only thinking about the song of 'Caller Herring;' and how glad those women must be to find their husbands come back this morning. Fancy their being out on such a night as last night. What it must be to be a fisherman's wife—and alone on shore——"

"Toots, toots, lass!" cried the Laird, with a splendid cheerfulness; for he was greatly relieved that this was all the cause of the wet eyes. "Ye are jist giving way to a sentiment. I have observed that people are apt to be sentimental in the morning, before they get their breakfast. What! are ye peetying these folk? I can tell ye this is a proud day for them, to judge by they heaps o' fish. They are jist as happy as kings; and as for the risk o' their trade, they have to do what is appointed to them. Why, does not that Doctor

friend o' yours say that the happiest people are they who are hardest worked?"

This reference to the Doctor silenced the young lady at once.

"Not that I have much right to talk about work," said the Laird, penitently. "I believe I am becoming the idlest crayture on the face of this world."

At this point a very pretty little incident occurred. A boat was passing to the shore; and in the stern of her was a young fisherman—a handsome young fellow, with a sun-tanned face and yellow beard. As they were going by the yacht, he caught a glimpse of Miss Avon; then when they had passed, he said something in Gaelic to his two companions, who immediately rested on their oars. Then he was seen rapidly to fill a tin can with two or three dozen herrings; and his companions backed their boat to the side of the yacht. The young fellow stood up in the stern, and with a shy laugh—but with no speech, for he was doubtless nervous about his English—offered his present to the young lady. She was very much pleased; but she blushed quite as much as he did. And she was confused, for she could not summon Master Fred to take charge of the herrings, seeing this compliment was so directly paid to herself. However, she boldly gripped the tin can, and said, "Oh, thank you very much;" and by this time the Laird had fetched a bucket, into which the glittering beauties were slipped. Then the can was handed back, with further and profuse thanks, and the boat pushed off.

Suddenly, and with great alarm, Miss Avon remembered that Angus had taught her what Highland manners were.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she called out to the bearded young fisherman, who instantly turned round, and the oars were stopped. "I beg your pardon," said she, with an extreme and anxious politeness, "but would you take a glass of whisky?"

"No, thank ye, mem," said the fisherman, with another laugh of friendliness on the frank face; and then away they went.

The girl was in despair. She was about to marry a Highlander, and already she had forgotten the first of Highland customs. But unexpected relief was at hand. Hearing something going on, John of Skye had tumbled up from the forecastle, and instantly saw that the young lady was sorely grieved that those friendly fishermen had not accepted this return compliment. He called aloud, in Gaelic, and in a severe tone. The three men came back, looking rather like schoolboys who would fain escape from an embarrassing interview. And then at the same moment Captain John, who had asked Fred to bring up the whisky-bottle, said in a low voice to the young lady—

"They would think it ferry kind, mem, if you would pour out the whisky with your own hand."

And this was done, Miss Mary going through the ceremony without flinching; and as each of the men was handed his glass, he rose up in the boat, and took off his cap, and drank the health of the young lady, in the Gaelic. And Angus Sutherland, when he came on deck, was greatly pleased to hear of what she had done; though the Laird took occasion to remark at breakfast that he hoped it was not a common custom among the young ladies of England to get up early in the morning to have clandestine flirtations with handsome young fishermen.

Then all hands on deck: for now there are two anchors to be got in, and we must not lose any of this pleasant sailing breeze. In these sheltered and shining waters there are scarcely any traces of the recent rough weather, except that the wind still comes in variable puffs, and from all sorts of unexpected directions. In the main, however, it is N. by E., and so we have to set to work to leisurely beat up the Sound of Raasay.

"Well, this is indeed like old times, Mary!" Queen Titania cries, as she comfortably ensconces herself in a camp-chair: for Miss Avon is at the helm, and the young Doctor, lying at full length on the sunlit deck, is watching the sails and criticising her steering; and the Laird is demonstrating to a humble listener the immeasurable advantages enjoyed by the Scotch landscape-painters, in that they have within so small a compass every variety of mountain, lake, woodland, and ocean scenery. He becomes facetious, too, about Miss Mary's sketches. What if he were to have a room set apart for them at Denny-mains, to be called the *White Dove* Gallery? He might have a skilled decorator out from Glasgow to devise the furniture and ornamentation, so that both should suggest the sea, and ships, and sailors.

Here John of Skye comes aft.

"I think," says he to Miss Avon, with a modest smile, "we might put the gaff topsail on her."

"Oh, yes, certainly," says this experienced mariner; and the Doctor, seeing an opportunity for bestirring himself, jumps to his feet.

And so, with the topsail shining white in the sun—a thing we have not seen for some time—we leave behind us the gloomy opening into Loch Sligachan, and beat up through the Raasay narrows, and steal by the pleasant woods of Raasay House. The Laird has returned to that project of the Marine Gallery, and he has secured an attentive listener in the person of his hostess, who prides herself that she has a sure instinct as to what is "right" in mural decoration.

This is indeed like old times come back again. The light, cool breeze, the warm decks, the pleasant lapping of the water, and our steerswoman partly whistling and partly humming—

"They'll put a napkin round my e'en,
They'll no let me see to dee;
And they'll never let on to my faither and mither,
But I am awa' o'er the sea."

And this she is abstractedly and contentedly doing, without any notice of the fact that the song is supposed to be a pathetic one.

Then our young Doctor: of what does he discourse to us during this delightful day-dreaming and idleness? Well, it has been remarked by more than one of us that Dr. Angus has become tremendously practical of late. You would scarcely have believed that this was the young F.R.S. who used to startle the good Laird out of his wits by his wild speculations about the origin of the world and similar trifles. Now his whole interest seemed to be centred on the commonest things: all the Commissioners of the Burgh of Strathgovan put together could not have been more fierce than he was about the necessity of supplying houses with pure water, for example. And the abuse that he heaped on the Water Companies of London, more especially, and on the Government which did not interfere, was so distinctly libellous that we are glad no alien overheard it.

Then as to arsenic in wall-papers: he was equally dogmatic and indignant about that; and here it was his hostess, rather than the Laird, who was interested. She eagerly committed to her note-book a recipe for testing the presence of that vile metal in wall-papers or anything else; and some of us had mentally to thank Heaven that she was not likely to get test-tubes, and zinc filings, and hydrochloric acid in Portree. The woman would have blown up the ship.

All this and much more was very different from the kind of conversation that used so seriously to trouble the Laird. When he heard Angus talk with great common sense and abundant information about the various climates that suited particular constitutions, and about the best soils for building houses on, and about the necessity for strict municipal supervision of drainage, he was ready to believe that our young Doctor had not only for his own part never handled that dangerous book, the *Vestiges of Creation*, but

that he had never even known any one who had glanced at its sophistical pages except with a smile of pity. Why, all the time that we were shut up by the equinoctials, the only profound and mysterious thing that Angus had said was this: "There is surely something wrong when the man who takes on himself all the trouble of drawing a bottle of ale is bound to give his friend the first tumbler, which is clear, and keep the second tumbler, which is muddy, for himself." But if you narrowly look into it, you will find that there is really nothing dangerous or unsettling in this saying—no grumbling against the ways of Providence whatsoever. It is mysterious, perhaps; but then so would many of the nice points about the Semple case have been, had we not had with us an able expositor.

And on this occasion, as we were running along for Portree, our F.R.S. was chiefly engaged in warning us against paying too serious heed to certain extreme theories about food and drink which were then being put forward by a number of distinguished physicians.

"For people in good health, the very worst adviser is the doctor," he was saying; when he was gently reminded by his hostess that he must not malign his own calling, or destroy a superstition that might in itself have curative effects.

"Oh, I scarcely call myself a doctor," he said, "for I have no practice as yet. And I am not denying the power of a physician to help nature in certain cases—of course not; but what I say is that for healthy people the doctor is the worst adviser possible. Why, where does he get his experience?—from the study of people who are ill. He lives in an atmosphere of sickness; his conclusions about the human body are drawn from bad specimens; the effects that he sees produced are produced on too sensitive subjects. Very likely, too, if he is himself a distinguished physician, he has gone through an immense amount of training

and subsequent hard work; his own system is not of the strongest; and he considers that what he feels to be injurious to him must be injurious to other people. Probably so it might be—to people similarly sensitive; but not necessarily to people in sound health. Fancy a man trying to terrify people by describing the awful appearance produced on one's internal economy when one drinks half a glass of sherry! And that," he added, "is a piece of pure scientific sensationalism; for precisely the same appearance is produced if you drink half a glass of milk."

"I am of opinion," said the Laird, with the gravity befitting such a topic, "that of all steemulants nothing is better or wholesomer than a drop of sound, sterling whisky."

"And where are you likely to get it?——"

"I can assure ye, at Denny-mains——"

"I mean where are the masses of the people to get it? What they get is a cheap white spirit, reeking with fusel-oil, with just enough whisky blended to hide the imposture. The decoction is a certain poison. If the Government would stop tinkering at Irish franchises, and Irish tenures, and Irish Universities, and would pass a law making it penal for any distiller to sell spirits that he has not had in bond for at least two years, they would do a good deal more service to Ireland, and to this country too."

"Still, these measures of amelioration must have their effect," observed the Laird, sententiously. "I would not discourage wise legislation. We will reconcile Ireland sooner or later, if we are prudent and conseederate."

"You may as well give them Home Rule at once," said Dr. Angus, bluntly. "The Irish have no regard for the historical grandeur of England; how could they?—they have lost their organ of veneration. The coronal region of the skull has in time become depressed, through frequent shillelagh practice."

For a second the Laird glanced at him: there was a savour of George Combe about this speech. Could it be that he believed in that monstrous and atheistical theory?

But no. The Laird only laughed; and said:

"I would not like to have an Irishman hear ye say so."

It was now abundantly clear to us that Denny-mains could no longer suspect of anything heterodox and destructive this young man who was sound on drainage, pure air, and a constant supply of water to the tanks.

Of course, we could not get into Portree without Ben Inivaig having a tussle with us. This mountain is the most inveterate brewer of squalls in the whole of the West Highlands, and it is his especial delight to catch the unwary, when all their eyes are bent on the safe harbour within. But we were equal with him. Although he tried to tear our masts out and frighten us out of our senses, all that he really succeeded in doing was to put us to a good deal of trouble and break a tumbler or two below. We pointed the finger of scorn at Ben Inivaig. We sailed past him, and took no more notice of him. With a favouring breeze, and with our topsail still set, we glided into the open and spacious harbour.

But that first look round was a strange one. Was this really Portree Harbour, or were we so many Rip Van Winkles? There were the shining white houses, and the circular bay, and the wooded cliffs; but where were the yachts that used to keep the place so bright and busy? There was not an inch of white canvas visible. We got to anchor near a couple of heavy smacks; the men looked at us as if we had dropped from the skies.

We went ashore and walked up to the telegraph office to see whether the adjacent islands of great Britain and Ireland—as the Cumbrae minister called them—had survived the equinoctials; and learned only

too accurately what serious mischief had been done all along these coasts by the gale. From various points, moreover, we subsequently received congratulations on our escape, until we almost began to believe that we had really been in serious peril. For the rest, our friends at Borva were safe enough; they had not been on board their yacht at all.

That evening, in the silent and deserted bay, a council of war was held on deck. We were not, as it turned out, quite alone; there had also come in a steam yacht, the master of which informed our John of Skye that such a gale he had not seen for three-and-twenty years. He also told us that there was a heavy sea running in the Minch; and that no vessel would try to cross. Stornoway Harbour, we already knew, was filled with storm-stayed craft. So we had to decide.

Like the very small and white-faced boy who stood forth to declaim before a school-full of examiners and friends, and who raised his hand, and announced in a trembling falsetto that his voice was still for war, it was the women who spoke first, and they were for going right on the next morning.

"Mind," said Angus Sutherland, looking anxiously at certain dark eyes; "there is generally a good sea in the Minch in the best of weathers; but after a three or four days' gale—well——"

"I, for one, don't care," said Miss Avon, frankly regarding him.

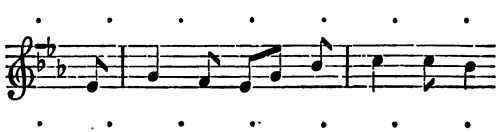
"And I should like it," said the other woman, "so long as there is plenty of wind. But if Captain John takes me out into the middle of the Minch and keeps me rolling about on the Atlantic in a dead calm, then something will befall him that his mother knew nothing about."

Here Captain John was emboldened to step forward, and to say, with an embarrassed politeness—

"I not afraid of anything for the leddies; for two better sailors I never sah ahl my life lang."

However, the final result of our confabulation that night was the resolve to get under way next morning, and proceed a certain distance until we should discover what the weather was like outside. With a fair wind, we might run the sixty miles to Stornoway before night; without a fair wind, there was little use in our adventuring out to be knocked about in the North Minch, where the Atlantic finds itself jammed into the neck of a bottle, and rebels in a somewhat frantic fashion. We must do our good friends in Portree the justice to say that they endeavoured to disuade us; but then we had sailed in the *White Dove* before, and had no great fear of her leading us into any trouble.

And so, good night!—good night! We can scarcely believe that this is Portree Harbour, so still and quiet it is. All the summer fleet of vessels have fled; the year has gone with them; soon we, too, must betake ourselves to the south. Good night!—good night! The peace of the darkness falls over us; if there is any sound, it is the sound of singing in our dreams.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

"A GOOD ONE FOR THE LAST."

"Ah, well, well," said the Laird, somewhat sadly, to his hostess, "I suppose we may now conseeder that we have started on our last day's sailing in the *White Dove?*"

"I suppose so," said she; and this was before breakfast, so she may have been inclined to be a bit sentimental too.

"I'm thinking," said he, "that some of us may hereafter look back on this sailing as the longest and grandest holiday of their life, and will recall the name of the *White Dove* with a certain amount of affection. I, for one, feel that I can scarcely justify myself for withdrawing so long from the duties that society demands from every man; and no doubt there will be much to set right when one goes back to Strathgovan. But perhaps one has been able to do something even in one's idleness——"

He paused here, and remained silent for a moment or two.

"What a fine thing," he continued, "it must be for a doctor to watch the return of health to a patient's face—to watch the colour coming back, and the eyes looking happy again, and the spirits rising; and to think that maybe he has helped. And if he happens to know the patient, and to be as anxious about her as if she were his own child, do not ye think he must be a proud man when he sees the results of what he has done for her, and when he hears her begin to laugh again?"

Despite the Laird's profound ingenuity, we knew very well who that doctor was. And we had learned something about the affection which this mythical physician had acquired for this imaginary patient.

"What a sensitive bit crayture she is!" said he, suddenly, as if he were now talking of some quite different person. "Have ye seen the difference the last few days have made on her face—have ye not observed it?"

"Yes, indeed I have."

"Ye would imagine that her face was just singing a song from the morning till the night—I have never seen any one with such expressive eyes as that bit lass

has—and—and—it is fairly a pleasure to any one to look at the happiness of them."

"Which she owes to you, sir."

"To me?" said the Laird. "Dear me!—not to me. It was a fortunate circumstance that I was with ye on board the yacht, that is all. What I did no man who had the chance could have refused to do. No, no; if the lass owes any gratitude to anybody or anything it is to the Semple case."

"What?"

"Just so, ma'am," said the Laird composedly. "I will confess to ye that a long holiday spent in sailing had not that attraction for me it might have had for others—though I think I have come to enjoy it now with the best of ye; but I thought, when ye pressed me to come, that it would be a grand opportunity to get your husband to take up the Semple case, and master it thoroughly, and put its merits in a just manner before the public. That he does not appear to be as much interested in it as I had reason to expect is a misfortune—perhaps he will grow to see the importance of the principles involved in it in time; but I have ceased to force it on his attention. In the meanwhile we have had a fine, long holiday, which has at least given me leisure to consider many schemes for the advantage of my brother pareeshioners. Ay; and where is Miss Mary though?"

"She and Angus have been up for hours, I believe," said his hostess. "I heard them on deck before we started anyway."

"I would not disturb them," said the Laird, with much consideration. "They have plenty to talk about—all their life opening up before them—like a road through a garden, as one might say. And whatever befalls them hereafter I suppose they will always remember the present time as the most beautiful of their existence—the wonder of it, the newness, the hope. It is a strange thing that Ye know, ma'am, that our

garden at Denny-mains, if I may say so, is far from insigneeficant. It has been greatly commended by experienced landscape gardeners. Well, now, that garden, when it is just at its fullest of summer colour —with all its dahlias and hollyhocks and what not— I say ye cannot get half as much delight from the whole show as ye get from the first glint o' a primrose, as ye are walking through a wood, on a bleak March day, and not expecting to see anything of the kind. Does not that make your heart jump?"

Here the Laird had to make way for Master Fred and the breakfast tray.

"There is not a bairn about Strathgovan," he continued, with a laugh, "knows better than myself where to find the first primroses and bluebells and the red deadnettle, ye know, and so on. Would ye believe it, that poor crayture, Johnny Guthrie, was for cutting down the hedge in the Coulterburn Road, and putting up a stone dyke!" Here the Laird's face grew more and more stern, and he spoke with unnecessary vehemence. "I make bold to say that the man who would cut down a hawthorn hedge where the children go to gather their bits o' flowers, and would put in its place a stone wall for no reason on the face of the earth, I say that man is an ass—an intolerable and perneecious ass!"

But this fierceness instantly vanished, for here was Mary Avon come in to bid him good morning. And he rose and took both her hands in his and regarded the upturned smiling face and the speaking eyes.

"Ay, ay, lass," said he, with great satisfaction and approval, "ye have got the roses into your cheeks at last. That is the morning air—the 'roses weet wi' dew'—it is a fine habit that of early rising. Dear me, what a shilpit bit thing ye were when I first saw ye about three months ago. And now I dare say ye are just as hungry as a hawk with walking up and down

the deck in the sea-air—we will not keep ye waiting a moment."

The Laird got her a chair, next his own of course; and then rang Master Fred's bell violently.

"How's her head, skipper?" said Queen T., when the young Doctor made his appearance—he had roses, too, in his cheeks, freshened by the morning air.

"Well," said he frankly, as he sate down, "I think it would be judicious to have breakfast over as soon as possible; and get the things stowed away. We are flying up the Sound of Raasay like a witch on a broom; and there will be a roaring sea when we get beyond the shelter of Skye."

"We have been in roaring seas before," said she, confidently.

"We met a schooner coming into Portree Harbour this morning," said he, with a dry smile. "She left yesterday afternoon just before we got in. They were at it all night, but had to run back at last. They said they had got quite enough of it."

This was a little more serious, but the women were not to be daunted. They had come to believe in the *White Dove* being capable of anything, especially when a certain aid to John of Skye was on board. For the rest, the news was that the day was lovely, the wind fair for Stornoway, and the yacht flying northward like an arrow.

There was a certain solemnity, nevertheless, or perhaps only an unusual elaborateness, about our preparations before going on deck. Gun-cases were wedged in in front of canvases, so that Miss Avon's sketches should not go rolling on to the floor; all such outlying skirmishers as candlesticks, aneroids, draught-boards, and the like, were moved to the rear of compact masses of rugs; and then the women were ordered to array themselves in their waterproofs. Waterproofs?—and the sun flooding through the skylight! But they obeyed.

Certainly there did not seem to be any great need for waterproofs when we got above and had the women placed in a secure corner of the companion-way. It was a brilliant, breezy, blue-skied morning, with the decks as yet quite white and dry, and with the long mountainous line of Skye shining in the sun. The yacht was flying along at a famous pace before a fresh and steady breeze; already we could make out, far away on the northern horizon, a pale, low, faint-blue line, which we knew to be the hills of southern Lewis. Of course, one had to observe that the vast expanse of sea lying between us and that far line was of a stormy black; moreover, the men had got on their oil-skins, though not a drop of spray was coming on board.

As we spun along, however, before the freshening wind, the crashes of the waves at the bows became somewhat more heavy, and occasionally some jets of white foam would spring up into the sunlight. When it was suggested to Captain John that he might set the gaff topsail, he very respectfully and shyly shook his head. For one thing, it was rather strange that on this wide expanse of sea not a solitary vessel was visible.

Farther and farther northward. And now one has to look out for the white water springing over the bows, and there is a general ducking of heads when the crash forward gives warning. The decks are beginning to glisten now; and Miss Avon has received one sharp admonition to be more careful, which has somewhat damped and disarranged her hair. And so the *White Dove* still flies to the north—like an arrow—like a witch on a broom—like a hare, only that none of these things would groan so much in getting into the deep troughs of the sea; and not even a witch on a broom could perform such capers in the way of tumbling and tossing, and pitching and rolling.

However all this was mere child's play. We knew

very well when and where we should really "get it": and we got it. Once out of the shelter of the Skye coast, we found a considerably heavy sea swinging along the Minch, and the wind was still freshening up, insomuch that Captain John had to take the mizen and foresail off her. How splendidly those mountain masses of waves came heaving along—apparently quite black until they came near, and then we could see the sunlight shining green through the breaking crest; then there was a shock at the bows that caused the yacht to shiver from stem to stern; then a high springing into the air, followed by a heavy rattle and rush on the decks. The scuppers were of no use at all; there was a foot and a half of hissing and seething salt water all along the lee bulwarks, and when the gangway was lifted to let it out the next rolling wave only spouted an equal quantity up on deck, soaking Dr. Angus Sutherland to the shoulder. Then a heavier sea than usual struck her, carrying off the cover of the fore hatch and sending it spinning aft; while, at the same moment, a voice from the forecastle informed Captain John in an injured tone that this last invader had swamped the men's berths. What could he do but have the main tack hauled up to lighten the pressure of the wind? The waters of the Minch, when once they rise, are not to be stilled by a bottle of salad oil.

We had never before seen the ordinarily buoyant *White Dove* take in such masses of water over her bows; but we soon got accustomed to the seething lake of water along the lee scuppers, and allowed it to subside or increase as it liked. And the women were now seated a step lower on the companion-way, so that the rags of the waves flew by them without touching them; and there was a good deal of laughing and jesting going on at the clinging and stumbling of any unfortunate person who had to make his way along the deck. As for our indefatigable Doctor, his face had

been running wet with salt water for hours; twice he had slipped and gone headlong to leeward; and now, with a rope double twisted round the tiller, he was steering, his teeth set hard.

"Well, Mary," shrieked Queen Titania into her companion's ear. "We are having a good one for the last!"

"Is he going up the mast?" cried the girl in great alarm.

"I say we are having a good one for the last!"

"Oh, yes!" was the shout in reply. "She is indeed going fast!"

But about mid-day we passed within a few miles to the east of the Shiant Islands, and here the sea was somewhat moderated, so we tumbled below for a snack of lunch. The women wanted to devote the time to dressing their hair and adorning themselves anew; but purser Sutherland objected to this altogether. He compelled them to eat and drink while that was possible; and several toasts were proposed—briefly, but with much enthusiasm. Then we scrambled on deck again. We found that John had hoisted his foresail again, but he had let the mizen alone.

Northward and ever northward—and we are all alone on this wide, wide sea. But that pale line of coast at the horizon is beginning to resolve itself into definite form—into long, low headlands, some of which are dark in shadow, others shining in the sun. And then the cloudlike mountains beyond: can these be the far Suainabhal and Mealasabhal, and the other giants that look down on Loch Roag and the western shores? They seem to belong to a world beyond the sea.

Northward and ever northward; and there is less water coming over now, and less groaning and plunging, so that one can hear oneself speak. And what is this wagering on the part of the Doctor that we shall do the sixty miles between Portree and Storno-

way within the six hours? John of Skye shakes his head; but he has the main tack hauled down.

Then, as the day wears on, behold! a small white object in that line of blue. The cry goes abroad: it is Stornoway Light!

"Come, now, John!" the Doctor calls aloud. "Within the six hours—for a glass of whisky and a lucky sixpence!"

"We not at Styornaway Light yet," answered the prudent John of Skye, who is no gambler. But all the same, he called two of the men aft to set the mizen again; and as for himself, he threw off his oilskins and appeared in his proud uniform once more. This looked like business.

Well, it was not within the six hours, but it was within the six hours and a half, that we sailed past Stornoway lighthouse and its outstanding perch; and past a floating target with a red flag, for artillery practice; and past a barque which had been driven ashore two days before, and now stuck there, with her back broken. And this was a wonderful sight—after the lone, wide seas—to see such a mass of ships of all sorts and sizes crowded in here for fear of the weather. We read their names in the strange foreign type as we passed—*Die Heimath*, *Georg Washington*, *Friedrich der Grosse*, and the like—and we saw the yellow-haired Norsemen pulling between the vessels in their odd-looking double-bowed boats. And was not John of Skye a proud man that day, as he stood by the tiller in his splendour of blue and brass buttons, knowing that he had brought the *White Dove* across the wild waters of the Minch, when not one of these foreigners would put his nose outside the harbour?

The evening light was shining over the quiet town, and the shadowed castle, and the fir-tipped circle of hills, when the *White Dove* rattled out her anchor chain and came to rest. And as this was our last night on board, there was a good deal of packing and other

trouble. It was nearly ten o'clock when we came together again.

The Laird was in excellent spirits that night, and was more than ordinarily facetious; but his hostess refused to be comforted. A thousand Homeshes could not have called up a smile. For she had grown to love this scrambling life on board; and she had acquired a great affection for the yacht itself; and now she looked round this old and familiar saloon, in which we had spent so many snug and merry evenings together; and she knew she was looking at it for the last time.

At length, however, the Laird bethought himself of arousing her from her sentimental sadness, and set to work to joke her out of it. He told her she was behaving like a school girl come to the end of her holiday. Well, she only further behaved like a schoolgirl by letting her lips begin to tremble; and then she stealthily withdrew to her own cabin; and doubtless had a good cry there. There was no help for it, however: the child had to give up its plaything at last.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ADIEU.

Next morning, also: why should this tender melancholy still dwell in the soft and mournful eyes? The sunlight was shining cheerfully on the sweep of wooded hill, on the grey castle, on the scattered town, and on the busy quays. Busy was scarcely the word: there was a wild excitement abroad, for a vast take of herring had just been brought in. There, close in by the quays, were the splendidly-built luggers, with their masts right at their bows; and standing up in them their

stalwart crews, bronze-faced, heavy-bearded, with oil-skin caps, and boots up to their thighs. Then on the quays above the picturesquely-costumed women busy at the salting; and agents eagerly chaffering with the men; and empty barrels coming down in unknown quantities. Bustle, life, excitement pervaded the whole town; but our tender-hearted hostess, as we got ashore, seemed to pay no heed to it. As she bade good-bye to the men, shaking hands with each, there were tears in her eyes; if she had wished to cast a last glance in the direction of the *White Dove*, she could scarcely have seen the now still and motionless craft.

But by and by, when we had left our heavier luggage at the inn, and when we set out to drive across the island to visit some friends of ours who live on the western side, she grew somewhat more cheerful. Here and there a whiff of the fragrant peat-smoke caught us as we passed, bringing back recollections of other days. Then she had one or two strangers to inform and instruct; and she was glad that Mary Avon had a bright day for her drive across the Lewis.

"But what a desolate place it must be on a wet day," that young person remarked, as she looked away across the undulating moors, vast, and lonely, and silent.

Now, at all events, the drive was pleasant enough: for the sunlight brought out the soft ruddy browns of the bog-land, and ever and again the blue and white surface of a small loch flashed back the daylight from amid that desolation. Then occasionally the road crossed a brawling stream, and the sound of it was grateful enough in the oppressive silence. In due course of time we reached Garra-na-hina.

Our stay at the comfortable little hostelry was but brief, for the boat to be sent by our friends had not arrived, and it was proposed that in the mean time we should walk along the coast to show our companions

the famous stones of Callernish. By this time Queen Titania had quite recovered her spirits, and eagerly assented, saying how pleasant a walk would be after our long confinement on shipboard.

It was indeed a pleasant walk, through a bright and cheerful piece of country. And as we went along we sometimes turned to look around us—at the waters of the Black River, a winding line of silver through the yellow and brown of the morass; and at the placid blue waters of Loch Roag, with the orange line of seaweed round the rocks; and at the far blue bulk of Suainabhal. We did not walk very fast; and indeed we had not got anywhere near the Callernish stones, when the sharp eye of our young Doctor caught sight of two new objects that had come into this shining picture. The first was a large brown boat; rowed by four fishermen; the second was a long and shapely boat —like the pinnace of a yacht—also pulled by four men, in blue jerseys and scarlet caps. There was no one in the stern of the big boat; but in the stern of the gig were three figures, as far as we could make out.

Now no sooner had our attention been called to the two boats which had just come round the point of an island out there, than our good Queen Titania became greatly excited, and would have us all go out to the top of a small headland and frantically wave our handkerchiefs there. Then we perceived that the second boat instantly changed its course, and was being steered for the point on which we stood. We descended to the shore and went out on to some rocks, Queen Titania becoming quite hysterical.

"Oh, how kind of her! how kind of her!" she cried, "to come so far to meet us!"

For it now appeared that these three figures in the stern of the white pinnace, were the figures of a young lady, who was obviously steering, and of two small boys, one on each side of her, and both dressed as

young sailors. And the steerswoman—she had something of a sailor-look about her too; for she was dressed in navy blue; and she wore a straw hat with a blue ribbon and letters of gold. But you would scarcely have looked at the smart straw hat when you saw the bright and laughing face, and the beautiful eyes that seemed to speak to you long before she could get to shore. And then the boat was run into a small creek; and the young lady stepped lightly out—she certainly was young-looking, by the way, to be the mother of those two small sailors—and she quickly and eagerly and gladly caught Queen Titania with both her hands.

"Oh, indeed I beg your pardon," said she—and her speech was exceedingly pleasant to hear—"but I did not think you could be so soon over from Styornaway."

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—It appears that now all our voyaging is over, and we are about to retire into privacy again, I am expected, as on a previous occasion, to come forward and address to you a kind of epilogue, just as they do on the stage. This seems to me a sort of strange performance at the end of a yachting cruise, for what if a handful of salt water were to come over the bows and put out my trumpery footlights? However, what must be must, as married women know; and so I would first of all say a word to the many kind people who were so *very* good to us in these distant places in the north. You may think it strange to associate such things as fresh vegetables, or a basket of flowers, or a chicken, or a bottle of milk, or even a bunch of white heather, with sentiment; but people who have been sailing in the West Highlands do not think so—indeed, they know which is the most obliging and friendly and hospitable place *in the whole world.* And then a word to the reader. If I might hope that it is the same reader who has been with us in other climes in other years—who may have driven with us along the devious English lanes; and crossed the Atlantic, and seen the big cañons of the Rocky Mountains, and lived with us among those dear old people in the Black Forest; and walked with us on Mickleham Downs in the starlight, why, then, he may forgive us for taking him on such a tremendous long holiday in these Scotch lochs. But we hope that if ever he goes into these wilds for himself, he will

get as good a skipper as John of Skye, and have as pleasant and *true* a friend on board as the Laird of Denny-mains. Perhaps I may add, just to explain everything, that we are all invited to Denny-mains to spend Christmas; and something is going to happen there; and the Laird says that so far from objecting to a ceremony in the Episcopal Church, he will himself be present and give away the bride. It is even hinted that Mr. Tom Galbraith may come from Edinburgh as a great compliment; and then no doubt we shall all be introduced to him. And so—Good-bye!—Good-bye!—and another message —*from the heart*—to all the kind people who befriended us in those places far away!——T.]

THE END.

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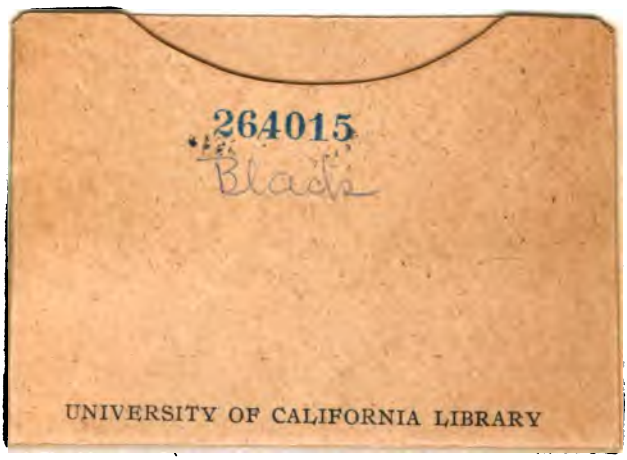
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